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*SALLIE TESELLE* Literature

# and the Christian Life

AVE MARIA UNIVERSITY

WITHDRAWN

*NEW HAVEN AND LONDON*

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To my mother

*JESSIE REID McFAGUE*

and in memory of my father

*MAURICE GRAEME McFAGUE 1900-1947*



## Preface

*MY INTEREST* in the relation between Christianity and literature arose in college when, as an English major, I began to investigate possible points of contact between these two most important facets of my life. That interest resulted in a long paper on the imagery of the fall of man in the poetry of John Donne and Andrew Marvell. The use of Christian symbolism by English poets is, of course, an obvious point of contact between Christianity and literature; but while an interesting one to note, it did not seem to me to get at the central relationship between them. In my seminary years I attempted another study of the relationship, this time focusing on the notion of time in the novels of William Faulkner, with a parallel analysis of time in the New Testament. But this approach, while also interesting, resulted only in two parallel studies, with similarities and differences noted.

After rather extensive reading in current positions on the relation between Christianity and the arts, I have come to see that the methodological problem has a priority that has not been adequately acknowledged; that is to say, one important task would be first to define the terms of the relationship—"Christianity" and "literature"—so that the central point of contact between them can emerge. Or, to put it somewhat differently, the sort of relationship between Christianity and literature that I propose to develop is one that not only protects their distinctive marks, but in fact emerges from the individuality of each. Analyses of religious and/or Christian themes in various works of literature are being done, and interesting though often vague treatments of religion and literature are available. But few have attempted to look at the nature and function of literature and then at

the Christian faith, in order to discover the relationship between them that emerges. The lack of such a study is one reason for my presumption in attacking the relationship at the roots.

Another reason is my conviction that it is on the methodological aspect of the relationship that theologians ought to focus. Neither I nor most of my colleagues are trained in literary criticism; nor do we usually have the breadth of reading and the innate sensitivity necessary for first-rate literary criticism. We are, however, trained in, and hopefully perceptive in, the handling of ideas and the basic methodological matters. This does not mean, however, that methodology and concrete appreciation of literary works can be separated, that any methodology worth its salt can be worked out apart from wide and sensitive acquaintance with literature and with the Christian faith. In fact, the very opposite is true, for my basic contention is that the central relationship between Christianity and literature is one that can be developed only when each is first appreciated in its concrete and individual integrity. It is for this reason my inquiry is directed to literature and the Christian life and not to aesthetics and religion or to art and Christianity. The main task, then, is methodology, but a concrete, empirical methodology that is best described by that much abused term, "existential."

My position in this essay has been molded, on the one hand, by the theological tradition concerned with the living of as well as the thinking about the Christian faith—a tradition that includes Paul, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Edwards, Kierkegaard, Bonhoeffer, and Barth, as well as many others; and, on the other hand, by the tradition of literary criticism that does not cringe before the great issues of life while at the same time insisting most assiduously that art is not life—a tradition that includes, among others, Erich Auerbach, Cleanth Brooks, T. S. Eliot, Erich Heller, Iredell Jenkins, R. W. B. Lewis, William F. Lynch, George Steiner, and Eliseo Vivas.

I am also indebted to my teachers at Yale for their insights and assistance. Specifically, I would like to mention the influence and aid of Julian N. Hartt, James M. Gustafson,

Hans W. Frei, H. Richard Niebuhr, Paul Schubert, Robert L. Calhoun, and Paul L. Holmer. I would also like to thank Wayland W. Schmitt of the Yale University Press, whose perceptive critical reading of the manuscript provided the basis for several revisions, and Mrs. Kathleen Roberts also of the Press, whose painstaking editorial hand is evident throughout. But most of all I am grateful to my husband who not only read and gave advice on the manuscript at various stages, but also encouraged me to stay with it when the "feminine mystique" would beckon toward something less rigorous.

All biblical quotations are from the Revised Standard Version (New York, Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1952). The bibliography is not a complete list of all the works read in preparation for this study or mentioned casually in it, but includes only those that have contributed substantially to the argument. An earlier version was submitted as a Ph.D. dissertation to the Yale Graduate School.

S. T.

Monterey, Mass.  
August 8, 1965





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# Introduction

*IT IS WISE* to begin a study of the relationship between literature and Christianity with some awareness of the potential dangers for both parties of the relation. Christian thinkers have traditionally been ambivalent, to say the least, about the role of the arts in the Christian enterprise, perhaps conscious, as was Plato, of the pervasive influence of art, which can tempt a man to evil as well as lead him to good behavior. Some Protestants in particular have been negative in their approach to the arts, feeling that Christian faith brings its own illumination and has no need of the knowledge of man and the world that the cultural disciplines offer. Christian attitudes toward culture in general and the arts in particular range, of course, across a wide spectrum; H. Richard Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture* develops five types that are perhaps as inclusive and specific as a typology can be.<sup>1</sup> Yet, even the type most positive toward culture, the type Niebuhr calls "the Christ of culture," recognizes the permanent distinction between Christ and culture. There is, it seems, in the heart of every Christian, a consciousness, however dim, that his faith involves a renunciation of the world or at least a detachment from it—a consciousness sharpened by his reading of the New Testament. This enduring awareness, from whatever source and to whatever degree, has made Christians question the relevance of the cultural disciplines for the Christian enterprise. Augustine saw his youthful indulgence in the theater as a temptation of the devil, and Barth believes the findings of philosophy, science, and the arts irrelevant to the reality of man.<sup>2</sup> For whatever reasons and to whatever extent, many Christians have

1. New York, 1951.

2. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh, 1936-62), III/2, 71-132.

rejected a marriage of Christianity and the arts, insisting that the relation be at most a permanent engagement and at the least a divorce.

But if Christians are uneasy about the arts, many artists and critics are highly suspicious of Christianity. The reasons for the suspicion are legion and are often closely related to particular historical, interpretive, and institutional developments within Christianity.<sup>3</sup> But Faulkner's dislike of Southern Calvinism and Camus' rejection of Luther's angry God do not drive to the depths of artistic suspicion of Christianity. The quarrel is not primarily on the interpretive and institutional level, but arises from the bold claim that each makes in its own way to be an avenue to truth. A truth claim always has a finality and absoluteness that excludes all other truth claims, at least for the time while one is attending totally to the claim itself. To read T. S. Eliot's "Ash Wednesday" with the question of whether it expresses true Christianity is to subvert the truth claim of the poem itself for an alien claim. The sort of truth that literature offers us is, as we shall see, unique and unsubstitutable.<sup>4</sup> This is surely one reason why artists are notoriously reluctant to discuss their work in categories proper to other types of truth claims, whether they be scientific, philosophical, or religious.

Quite legitimately, literary critics in our day have revived the protest, formerly lulled into silence by Matthew Arnold and Tolstoy, against all attempts to subsume art under religion. The trend in critical circles has been toward the isolation of the arts from any relation to science, philosophy, or religion. The New Critics in poetic criticism, and to some extent in criticism of the novel, have insisted that literature is not the savior of the world, is not morality or therapy, and does not offer philosophies of life. Rather, it is a unique mode of apprehension with its own peculiar contributions to the human enterprise.

But the relations of artist and critic to Christianity are far more complex and often more positive than can be suggested under the rubric of suspicion. Granted the chasm that sepa-

3. See Chapter 4, pp. 202-03.

4. A discussion of the unique entree into reality that art offers us and the truth of its perspective on reality appears in Chapter 2, pp. 84-102.

rates them—the absoluteness and exclusiveness of their truth claims—there are nevertheless bridges that span the divide. There are many artists and critics who are Christians, or who have been influenced by Christianity, or who, simply because they have been educated in the West, cannot escape from the Judaic-Christian tradition. The works of our greatest novelists and poets breathe the atmosphere of the Christian moral and cosmic world-view, even if no Christian theme is ever mentioned. The intimacy of Christianity and literature is built into our culture, as Erich Auerbach's brilliant *Mimesis* suggests. Such intimacy makes for complex, confused, and often bitter domestic quarrels. It is not the intention of this study to investigate the historical, cultural, or institutional relationships between Christianity and literature; but it is important to acknowledge their complexity, for they are inextricably involved with the ambivalent feelings of some artists toward Christianity and of some Christians toward the arts.

However, I would stress again that the main issue between Christians and artists, Christianity and the arts, is the legitimate one of the protection of the uniqueness of their individual truth claims. While the ambivalent feelings of the Christian toward the arts rest on his belief in the distinctiveness of the Christian faith from the world, the ambivalent feelings of the artist and critic toward Christianity rest on their fear of compromising the distinctiveness of art by allowing it to be absorbed by religion or by anything else.

These are legitimate fears. They militate against an easy relation between Christianity and literature, and they force any theologian or critic who is attempting to formulate a theory about the relationship to take the integrity of each with utmost seriousness. This point cannot be too heavily underscored. Amos Wilder says what needs to be said when he writes as follows:

Any true bridge-building between religion and the arts will require a deeper grasp of what religion is and what art is: a better theology and a better aesthetic. A better theology will not identify religion or Christianity with any and every fervid or didactic impulse, nor with any and every experience of Beauty or the Spirit. And a better aesthetic will not be satisfied with a view of the imagination which

exiles it from the real world. . . . When religion and art are rebaptized in a total life experience they are first set apart according to their distinct roles and then may be drawn together in a valid interrelation and interpenetration.<sup>5</sup>

A fundamental aspect of my attempt to formulate the relation between Christianity and literature will be the insistence upon first setting them apart according to their distinct roles, so that the interrelation and interpenetration that follows will not compromise the distinctiveness of either but will arise from the integrity of each.

One further note is necessary before turning to substantive issues. It is with fear and trembling and with a sense of inadequacy that anyone trained in theology enters the bastion of literary criticism.

There is no reason to suppose that those trained in theology, or philosophy for that matter, are likely to possess, what is essential to the practice of literary criticism, that "sensitiveness of the intelligence" described by Matthew Arnold as equivalent to conscience in moral matters. A theological training seems to have a disabling effect and has subsequently to be struggled against when literary criticism is the concern.<sup>6</sup>

One must accept this criticism, I believe, and it would perhaps be a decisive deterrent if the intent of the theologian were primarily to do literary criticism. But my intent, at any rate, is mainly theological: it is to investigate the relation between literature and the Christian life; this will involve some literary criticism but in a minor, not in a principal way.

On the contrary, the main thing is to analyze, on the one hand, the nature and function of literature and, on the other hand, the life of the Christian man, in order to discover, if possible, the point at which literature, understood in its own integrity, may be relevant to the Christian. The stance assumed will be that of the Christian in his task of working out what he believes he already is—a man redeemed by the love of God. It will be the stance of this man as he looks at literature to ascertain its relevance to his task. I am by no

5. Amos N. Wilder, "Christianity and the Arts: The Historic Divorce and the Contemporary Situation," *Christian Scholar*, 40 (1957), 268.

6. Q. D. Leavis, "Charlotte Yonge and 'Christian Discrimination,'" *Scrutiny*, 12 (1944), 158.



means saying that this is the function of literature, for literature, like all the arts, has its own function and glory quite apart from the Christian or anyone else. I am only suggesting that, given what literature is and does in itself, it may be relevant to the Christian as well as to other men with other concerns. Nor am I insisting that the Christian life is the only point at which one can locate a relation between Christianity and literature. Art, in its depiction of the human situation as one of need and alienation, may aid the unbeliever to come to the Gospel (and we are all to some extent unbelievers). The arts may also vividly embody the major doctrines of Christian faith in a form of expression that men can assimilate more readily than they can the conceptual form. But it does not seem to me that the heart of the matter in Christianity is either doubt or doctrine. Rather, it is the Christian life itself—the working out of faith in the love of God manifest in Jesus Christ. Hence, the principal relationship between literature and Christianity must, I believe, be at this point, though other relations need not thereby be excluded.

In keeping with these convictions the main thrust of this essay will be an analysis of the nature and function of literature, a treatment of the Christian life, and an attempt to show the relevance of literature to the Christian life. To show this concretely, I must enter the arena of literary criticism, and I will do so with some comments on contemporary novels, but only with the intent of illuminating the importance of these novels to the Christian, not treading on ground better occupied by others trained in criticism. As a preliminary to this venture, a short summary of some contemporary options in relating religion and art ought to help define my debt to other positions as well as my distinction from them.



## CHAPTER 1

# Religion and the Arts

*CHRISTIANS* have always been interested in the arts, sometimes to praise, sometimes to damn, sometimes to nod approval but with knitted brow. As Christianity is a total view of life, it has seemed impossible to most Christians to ignore the arts which appear to play an important role in the life of man. But what role they ought to play in the life of the Christian has not met with much agreement, and the New Testament is of scant help here. Christians who love the arts and have found them in some way significant to their own lives might perhaps pounce on Philippians 4:8 as the biblical justification for their delight in aesthetic experience. But Paul is maddeningly cryptic: he only tells us to "think about" whatever is "lovely." But what are we to think about it? Christians have indeed thought about beauty or, more specifically, about the arts; but their thoughts have been so various that any complete typology of Christian positions in regard to the arts seems impossible. For our purposes, the making of such a typology would not be very important, if the concern were merely to catalogue historical positions within the Christian tradition. But if the concern were to look at some main types of Christian positions on the arts for the purpose of hammering out one's own understanding of the relation of the Christian faith and the arts through the examination of other positions, then a typology would be significant. Each Christian, it seems to me, has the task of relating his faith to all sorts of things, to whatever makes up the totality of life, including politics, the arts, family life, the sciences, and so on. An understanding of how it has been done by others in the past and how it is being done by his contemporaries is one means of helping him define his own way of doing it. This, then, is the intent of the present

chapter. We shall look at three types of Christian (or in some cases religious) concern with the arts in their contemporary dress, not for the purpose of satisfying our historical interest but for the purpose of working toward a constructive position that will do violence to neither faith nor art.

The major criterion by which we shall assess a position will be precisely the degree to which it does "violence to neither faith nor art." This criterion is simple enough: it merely says that whatever may be the relationship between Christian faith and the arts, there can be no relation that sacrifices the integrity of either. That Christianity is not art, nor art Christianity, may seem too obvious a truism to mention, but our survey of contemporary types will reveal that the compromising of one for the sake of the other is precisely the fault of most attempts to relate Christianity and the arts. So the only assumption thus far is that Christianity is one thing and the arts another. It is the intent of this chapter to show that some major contemporary positions on the relation of Christianity and the arts do not take this separation seriously and to discover why they do not. It is the intent of the rest of the study to show how a position that does take the integrity of each seriously can result in a relationship between them that is developed from their distinct natures and roles. The key, of course, to both the criticism of other positions and the projection of a new position is an understanding of the distinct natures and roles of both Christianity and the arts. The substantive questions that will always have to be asked are, "What is meant by Christianity here?" and "What is meant by art here?" The three positions that we shall survey briefly and critically I have called "religious amiability," "Christian discrimination," and "Christian aesthetics." Finally, we will take a closer look at the theological criticism of literary works that emerges from these positions.

### *RELIGIOUS AMIABILITY*

By religious amiability I mean an open-handed acceptance of culture in general and of the arts in particular because culture itself is crypto-religious. There is no antago-

nism between religion and art because ultimately they are the same thing in different dress. Paul Tillich is the outstanding modern exponent of this view, but the shadow of Matthew Arnold hovers nearby. Arnold insisted that poetry be given a "higher destiny" than our forefathers had given it, that we turn to it to interpret life and console us, to save us, now that science and philosophy had turned a cold shoulder to man's deepest personal needs.<sup>1</sup> Tillich by no means agrees with Arnold that poetry can save us, but he does opt for a higher destiny for art, a destiny so high above its traditional one of concentration on the finite reality of man and the world<sup>2</sup> that, like Arnold, he merges art with religion or, as he puts it, "as the substance of culture is religion, so the form of religion is culture." The only difference between religion and culture is that in religion the "substance" which is "the unconditioned source and abyss of meaning" is designated while in culture the "substance" is perceptible only indirectly.<sup>3</sup> Tillich is to be commended for his refusal to cut up the world into sacred and secular realms—an old ploy of Christians that has often relegated Christian faith to the annex of man's real life—but curiously, his insistence on the importance of secularity has not resulted in an appreciation of its integrity. Just the opposite. He sucks up the secular into the sacred, so that there is no such thing as an atheist, an autonomous culture, or a really secular secularity, but in the depths of every serious manifestation of culture is an "ultimate concern," Tillich's designation of religion. Every cultural form (and this of course includes every work of art) is, willy-nilly, crypto-religious.

We may protest that this is just not so; but it is necessary to attack Tillich at a deeper level than mere common-sense observation, for his insistence on the crypto-religiosity of art emerges from the very heart of his theology, from his basic

1. Matthew Arnold, "The Study of Poetry," *Criticism: The Foundations of Modern Literary Judgment*, ed. Mark Schorer, Josephine Miles, and Gordon McKenzie (New York, 1948), p. 489.

2. The statement that the traditional task of poetry is its concentration on the finite reality of man and the world is a historical as well as a systematic conviction which Chapter 2 attempts to substantiate.

3. Paul Tillich, *The Interpretation of History*, trans. N. A. Rosetzki and Elsa L. Talmey (New York, 1936), p. 50.

philosophy of religion. Tillich is a God-intoxicated man who cannot conceive of such a thing as atheism or real human autonomy. "Religion is the aspect of depth in the totality of the human spirit."<sup>4</sup> This does not mean simply that all men secretly believe in God, but that in all manifestations of the human spirit, in all man's attempts to express being or truth, goodness or beauty, a ground—what he calls the "power of being"—is implicitly invoked. The invocation may not be conscious but it is inescapable, because it points to "the absolute quality of all being and meaning and value, the power and vitality of the real as it fulfills itself in meaningful creativity."<sup>5</sup> One cannot be creative—one cannot, for instance, manifest beauty—without at the same time pointing indirectly and obliquely to the ground of all creativity, the power of being. This power of being is a quality, an adverbial mode, modifying all its finite manifestations, so that every creatural drive toward being, truth, goodness, or beauty carries the tinge and taste of its source. When an artist, for instance, strives to express beauty, it is this quality that he consciously or unconsciously seeks to manifest; it is necessarily his explicit or implicit ultimate concern, for it is that which is the source and ground of beauty. It is clear, then, that Tillich is certainly not saying that all art points to God, if that term is understood to mean "a being" or even "the highest being." What he is saying is in line with Augustinian participationist metaphysics—whatever is (or is meaningful, good, or beautiful) must participate in the one source of being. Augustine says that even a corpse, to the extent that it still has form and order, derives what being it has from the one source of all being, God.<sup>6</sup>

Given this basic philosophy of religion, it is easy to see why Tillich is amiable toward culture. After all, every cultural manifestation, if serious in intent, is cryptically religious. All real barriers between religion and culture or the sacred and the secular have been removed. There is a sense, it seems

4. Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture* (New York, 1959), p. 7.

5. James Luther Adams, "Tillich's Concept of the Protestant Era," in Paul Tillich, *The Protestant Era*, trans. James Luther Adams (Chicago, 1948), p. 301.

6. Augustine, "Concerning the Nature of the Good," *Basic Writings of St. Augustine*, ed. Whitney J. Oates (New York, 1948), I, 438.



to me, in which a Christian must agree with Tillich's metaphysics. It is natural and inevitable on the basis of belief in the one God as the source of one's own being and of the renewal of that being, to assert that he is the one and only source of all being, truth, goodness, and beauty. Christian belief is militantly anti-Manichaeism; it refers all things to God. But Tillich's position becomes suspect when we ask our basic questions: What is meant by Christianity here? and What is meant by art here?

Christianity is understood by Tillich within the context of his basic philosophy of religion. It is the answer to man's search for the power of being; it is the explicit assertion that man's drive toward meaning, goodness, beauty, and being will not be confounded either by his own perversity or by the negativities of his situation. The "Gestalt of Grace" has both a negative and a positive pole; it is the dialectic of the "No" of the "boundary situation," the "No" to all human attempts to absolutize the finite, and the "Yes" that comes to man when he relinquishes all props and feels the full brunt of despair over finitude as the basis of existence. This is the modern version of justification by faith.<sup>7</sup>

But the significant thing is that there is nothing specifically Christian about this pattern; the negative-positive dialectic is written into the nature of things. The ground of being includes within itself a negative element, or, as Tillich says, "the demonic is that form of contradiction of essence in which the contradiction is united with the essential and creative powers of life."<sup>8</sup> Tillich is not primarily talking about man's sin as the negative pole—a perverse orientation of the heart—but about a demonic element at the center of things—a metaphysical negativity—which man's perversion reflects historically. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Tillich is operating with a negative-positive dialectic of a general nature, which Christianity's notions of sin and grace mirror but do not substantially modify. It seems to me that Tillich's basic metaphysics rests on an intuition similar to Jacob Boehme's dark-light antithesis, where the dark is any

7. Paul Tillich, *The Protestant Era*, trans. James Luther Adams (Chicago, 1948), pp. 196-200.

8. Tillich, *Interpretation of History*, p. 94.

kind of chaos, negation, guilt, or alienation that is somehow integral to the light and leads to it. There is an inner connection between the divine and the demonic so that a full realization of and participation in the demonic is itself a movement toward the divine.

There is much in this understanding of Christianity that seems false to me—its lack of historicity, its insistence on philosophical categories to the exclusion of biblical ones—but for our purposes its most serious fault is the assumption that Christianity is a type of negative-positive dialectic, a dialectic in which the poles have an intrinsic connection. The dialectic of Christianity, as I understand it, is not between negative and positive poles but between God and man, a dialectic that is inescapably historical and one in which the connections rest solely upon decisions. The decisions that form the connections between God and man as understood by Christian faith are stated in the Apostles' Creed as the acts of creation, redemption, and continued presence on God's part, and belief or acceptance of these decisions on man's part. The connections are not built into the nature of things but arise from a historical dialogue between God and man. In his treatment of the relation of religion and art, Tillich is not operating with the specificity of Christianity at all, but with religion in general, by which he means any drive toward ultimacy and, because the negative is intrinsically related to the positive, any participation in chaos or alienation. As one commentator writes, Tillich "interprets religion as present wherever there is a uniting of negation and affirmation, of threat and support, of judgment and grace, of crisis and form-creation."<sup>9</sup> The generality of Tillich's position and the interpenetration of the negative and positive poles are evident when he writes that "the vacuum of disintegration can become . . . a 'sacred void' "<sup>10</sup> or that "he who can bear and express his finitude shows that somehow he participates in infinity."<sup>11</sup>

It is even clearer now how Tillich can be amiable toward

9. Adams, "Tillich's Concept of the Protestant Era," pp. 295-96.

10. Tillich, *Protestant Era*, p. 60.

11. Paul Tillich, "Protestantism and the Contemporary Style in the Visual Arts," *Christian Scholar*, 40 (1957), 311.

culture, how he can find the relation between religion and art to be an easy one. He calls religious not only those cultural manifestations that express the depths of being positively, such as Expressionistic painting, where the forms of things are dissolved in favor of evoking the "abyss of Being,"<sup>12</sup> but also those that express it negatively, such as Picasso's "Guernica," where alienation and the breakdown of finite meaning are prolegomena to insight. With his understanding of Christianity as the answer to the dilemma posed by his dark-light metaphysics, and with his understanding of art as one of the forms of man's search for the light (even when it takes the form of the dark), it is evident to Tillich that there can be no problem relating Christianity and the arts, for they are, as he says, but substance and form of a common pattern.

The test of the pie is in the eating. What of Tillich's concrete analysis of the religious significance of art? His criticism, which is largely centered on painting, follows the negative-positive dialectic of his philosophy of religion. The preferred art of our time is Expressionism, characterized by what he calls "religious style, nonreligious content," for this style of art disrupts the surface forms of finitude, creating a sense of negation and alienation, and at the same time gives support to the finite forms by pointing to their depths.<sup>13</sup> The pointing is not accomplished through dependence on any traditional religious symbols but is "a pure, mystic immediacy."<sup>14</sup> Tillich's phrase for uniting the negative and positive poles is "belief-ful realism," by which he means, as James Luther Adams explains, "a turning toward reality, a questioning of reality, a penetrating into existence, a driving to the level where reality points beyond itself to its ground and ultimate meaning."<sup>15</sup> Paintings such as "Guernica," van Gogh's "Night Cafe," and Chagall's "River Without Edges," which penetrate into the depths of finite forms by disrupting their surfaces and thus point to the ground of all

12. Paul Tillich, *The Religious Situation*, trans. H. Richard Niebuhr (New York, 1958), p. 87.

13. Paul Tillich, "Existentialist Aspects of Modern Art," *Christianity and the Existentialists*, ed. Carl Michalson (New York, 1956), pp. 136 ff.

14. Tillich, *Religious Situation*, pp. 88-89.

15. Adams, "Tillich's Concept of the Protestant Era," p. 296.

these forms, are the proper art for our time. They are proper precisely because they both mirror the alienation of man from his world, characteristic of contemporary life, and suggest the solution to the dilemma—the intuition of the light in the heart of the darkness, the “immeasurable depth” and “spiritual significance” of finitude when it is looked at realistically, yet with belief.<sup>16</sup>

Aye, there's the rub—“with belief.” Does a cold look at the realities to the point of negation necessarily come up with belief in a ground of meaning to the meaningless, in light at the heart of darkness? Is the void sacred? It seems to me that, on a common-sense level alone, this is not the case; and it certainly is not in line with Christian faith. Nor is it fair to those contemporary works of art whose ostensible subject matter is the alienation of our culture and not its hidden religious significance. Even Tillich's favorite painting, Picasso's “Guernica,” is a case in point. Tillich's position on the relation of religion and art protects neither the integrity of Christianity nor that of art: Christianity becomes a type of dark-light metaphysics (which it surely is not) and all art becomes cryptically religious; in fact, the more alienated it appears, the more religious it is. The curious twist in all this is that Tillich's religious amiability results in a kind of theological imperialism—not a Christian imperialism, but an imperialism that insists there can be no true secularity because all art is religious (in Tillich's meaning of religious), and that art criticism must finally be theological because there is ultimate concern manifest in every serious work of art.

The implications of Tillich's position are best seen in his followers, who have sifted down the master's thought to a few key tenets in their analysis of the religious significance of the arts. The main points are two in number, following Tillich's dark-light dialectic. Our contemporary art of alienation can be understood as a prolegomenon to the Gospel as it diagnoses the ills of modern man and readies him to accept the good news. But there are also glimmers of light in the darkness—works of art point cryptically and by means of

16. Tillich, *Protestant Era*, p. 66.

nonreligious symbols to the meaning of the meaningless and the infinite source of the finite.

Tillich's outstanding disciple and chief popularizer of his point of view is Nathan A. Scott, Jr. Scott says that great literature gives us "a map of the modern psyche"; it asks the questions of human existence by giving "the self-interpretation of man in our period," questions that the kerygma answers.<sup>17</sup> Yet, as with Tillich, there is an implicit connection between the dark and the light. In an analysis of alienation in the writings of Kafka, Silone, Lawrence, and Eliot, Scott says that Eliot's insistence on going *through* despair (St. John's dark night of the soul) is on the right track, for it prepares man to see "that the self's dissociation may yield the intuition of the presence in the self of Something which though transcending it, is yet the constitutive Power of the self and the hidden possibility of its reconciliation."<sup>18</sup> The same criticism leveled against Tillich's "sacred void" is relevant here. Kant pointed out that man's desire for an ultimate ground of being is a natural one, but the desire does not create the fact;<sup>19</sup> there is perhaps even less reason to suppose that the depths of despair will yield to cosmic affirmation. If Scott and others wish to see the arts as a diagnostic preparation to the preaching of the Gospel, with no implicit connection between question and answer, that is at least an old tradition in Christian apologetics; but to infer, as is often done, that the negative has a kind of sanctity and a power toward insight is more Hegelian than it is Christian.

The placing of a premium upon the art of alienation and upon the negative side is also evident in Amos Wilder's writings, though his debt to Tillich is mainly a shared stance of appreciation of the arts and especially of the contemporary art which renders in new idioms and with unremitting honesty the natural, secular life of man. Wilder claims that the peculiar contribution of Protestantism to the arts is its in-

17. Nathan A. Scott, Jr., *Modern Literature and the Religious Frontier* (New York, 1958), p. ix.

18. Nathan A. Scott, Jr., *Rehearsals of Discomposure: Alienation and Reconciliation in Modern Literature* (New York, 1952), p. 256.

19. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London, 1929), pp. 517-18.



sistence that artists be allowed to identify completely with the secular crisis, to the point that the orthodox Christian symbols may have to go underground and Christianity be manifest only as a "leaven."<sup>20</sup> This is a healthy and refreshing change from the religious preciousness and sentimentality of much nineteenth-century religious art, for there is perhaps nothing more necessary in the business of relating religion and art than to let art be secular. But again in Wilder's writings we find a premium placed on negativity—the suggestion that alienation is cryptically religious ("The unbelief of today is more affirmative than the shallow skepticism of yesterday. The poignant atheism of today is more pregnant than the dogmatic rationalism of yesterday");<sup>21</sup> a vagueness as to the role of Christianity (it is a leaven); and obscurity in the definition of religion (religion is "a celebration of the mysterious sources of human potency, security, orientation, and obligation").<sup>22</sup> To theological critics like Scott and Wilder, then, art serves as the negative pole of the dialectic by its diagnosis of the human situation or its baptism into secularity, and Christianity is understood either as a type of a general metaphysics or construed vaguely as a leaven. It seems to me that neither the integrity of art nor the specificity of the Christian faith is taken seriously.

These faults become even more obvious when we turn to art's role in the positive pole of the dialectic. To Tillich and his followers, art may manifest a true understanding of the world and man, but only under images other than biblical or traditional ones, because these have become stereotyped and stale. As Tillich puts it, there can be "religious style" in "nonreligious content"; or as Wilder says, grace must become incognito. That there is no sacredness to biblical imagery is true enough, but the nature of the positiveness conveyed through "religious style" seems to do violence both

20. Amos N. Wilder, *Modern Poetry and the Christian Tradition: A Study in the Relation of Christianity to Culture* (New York, 1952), pp. 194–96.

21. Amos N. Wilder, *Theology and Modern Literature* (Cambridge, 1958), p. 35.

22. Amos N. Wilder, "Poetry and Religion," *Christian Faith and the Contemporary Arts*, ed. Finley Eversole (New York, 1962), p. 110.

to art and to Christianity. The leading notion here is Tillich's "belief-ful realism" or the intuition that finitude points to infinity. As Scott says of the theological critic,

what he must first of all disclose to the modern poet is that his very distress in the presence of all the limited, incomplete things and events that offer themselves as reality, in so far as it contains implicitly a yearning to behold the infinite, inexhaustible depth of their being and meaning, does itself also contain an awareness of the "moving, restless power" which is "the inner infinity of being" and which informs and sustains all the conditioned and finite forms of existence.<sup>23</sup>

Is this so? Does an artistic awareness of the limitations of finite existence "implicitly" contain a yearning to behold the infinite depth of its being and meaning? It seems far more in keeping with the nature and function of the arts and particularly of literature to say that its positive expression is an intense concentration on the finite reality of the world and man for their own sakes; the distinctive artistic apprehension is a passionate desire to see the world and man more clearly or, as T. E. Hulme says, to trace "the exact curve" of a thing.<sup>24</sup> Need we or should we assert another purpose, a hidden religious one? Likewise, is this yearning to behold the infinite source of finitude the distinctive note of Christianity? It is certainly true that doubt about the meaningfulness and stability of finitude is overcome by Christian faith, but is this conviction reached through an intuition into the depths of finitude, or is it attained by acceptance of the revelation whereby God shows himself to be the ground and the renewer of all creation and particularly of man's mundane, historical life?

So again, the Tillichian position seems to fall short of relating art in its integrity to the Christian faith in its integrity. What it does is relate a particular philosophy of religion to art as one of the indirect expressions of this philosophy.

23. Scott, *Religious Frontier*, p. 62.

24. T. E. Hulme, *Speculations: Essays on Humanism and the Philosophy of Art* (New York, 1924), pp. 160 ff.



### CHRISTIAN DISCRIMINATION

The oldest and most variable type of relationship between Christianity and the arts is diametrically opposed to religious amiability. Its distinctive note is a lack of amiability toward any culture or any art that is not specifically, or at least latently, Christian. The definition of Christianity may vary widely, from a key doctrine such as original sin to a Gestalt of the Christian life as alien to the world; but whatever the standard be, there always is a standard by which art and culture are measured. The assumption of the extremists of this type is that Christianity is the truth and the whole truth about man and the world. This stance is critical and judgmental. For these reasons, they do not conceive of the possibility of art's aiding theological reflection or informing the Christian life, but concentrate on the degree to which the belief implicit in works of art is aligned with Christian truth. This is a gross description of a position that in the hands of its best practitioners can be at times both perceptive and subtle; it is necessarily only a general description of a type that, unlike religious amiability, has no one spokesman but a host of Christians who have very different standards and perspectives. Hence, it is the most difficult to characterize fairly and in depth.

The spiritual forebears of Christian discrimination are smack in the middle of the New Testament; it was the typical stance of Christians toward culture at least until the Constantinian era, and it has continued in our day in such otherwise unsympathetic camps as Catholicism (both Anglo- and Roman) and sectarian Protestantism.<sup>1</sup> Its two main

1. Ernst Troeltsch in his monumental study, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* (trans. Olive Wyon [London, 1956], 2, 733), notes that primitive Christianity contains the germ of the sect idea as well as that of the Church as an institution. The sect type, insisting on the absolute law in contrast to the Stoic natural law which has traditionally been Christianity's point of contact with culture, found its only alternative in separation from the world (Ibid., p. 1001). But as Troeltsch remarks, sectarianism is not the only form of Christianity that expresses hostility to the world. It is also found in the asceticism of Calvinism and the monasticism of Roman Catholicism (Ibid., p. 816). See also Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, pp. 45-82, for a sketch of extreme Christian discrimination.

concerns are doctrine and morals. The tendency is to see Christianity either as a set of doctrines or as a way of life that must be preserved unspotted from the world. The principal theoreticians of the former tendency are often first-rate poets and critics who are also Christians (T. E. Hulme, T. S. Eliot, Cleanth Brooks, Randall Stewart); they hold that the best art is that which reflects in its belief the Christian truth about man and the world, which is epitomized for them in the doctrine of original sin. There are also lesser members of this camp who, operating with a doctrine of the person and work of Christ, search literature for "Christ-figures," often located by such marks as dying at the age of thirty on a Friday. The second tendency, the concern with morals, emerges from an appreciation of the power of art to influence belief and life, to which Plato and Augustine nodded assent a long time ago. Augustine's advice to use but not enjoy the things of this world and Bunyan's portrayal of the soul afflicted by the temptations of the good and the beautiful in creation and culture are but two typical Christian responses to the burden of keeping unspotted from the world. Modern exponents of this view range from narrow moralism, resulting in a dualism of Christ and culture, to a sophisticated perception of the capacity of art to tempt to evil as well as lead to good, resulting in a discrimination of art and culture. To one degree or another, the doctrinal as well as the moralistic critics insist on the truism that Tillich seems to forget—that Christianity and culture are not the same thing, and that whatever might be the relationship between them, it must always be one that acknowledges the integrity of Christian distinctiveness. Unfortunately, some of these critics (though certainly not Hulme, Eliot, and Brooks) do not give art the same license to be itself and do its own job. More often than not, they are more interested in the effect of art on the Christian than they are in its integral nature and function.

With this brief and far too general summary of a type that ranges across the spectrum of Christians, let us turn to a few outstanding practitioners within the field in order to see concretely the meaning and value of these generalizations. Those for whom Christian discrimination operates at the

point of doctrine turn to T. E. Hulme as a seminal thinker. Hulme's adherence to the doctrine of original sin is the end result of a complex analysis of the inadequacy of contemporary life and art. In his *Speculations*, he reacts against the nineteenth-century idealism which celebrated the vitality of life and the perfectibility of man. In contrast, he feels that humanistic art and true religion are diametrically opposed, that true religion is concerned with the immutable and eternal, and that true art must reflect this pattern by pessimism toward the human and the vital and celebration of the static and abstract. Hence, his ideal is the geometric art of Cubism and the world-denying, nonvital art of Byzantium and Egypt. Hulme's interpretation of the doctrine of original sin as pessimistic and tragic permits him to find in it justification for moving away from an art concerned with the value of man and the world and toward an art linking the inorganic and nonhuman to the divine.<sup>2</sup>

To the extent that Hulme equates his notion of true religion with Christianity, he has a warped conception of Christianity and of the sort of art commensurate with it. It is a wrong view because original sin is certainly not the major Christian doctrine about the nature of man. The main Christian assertion about man is that all men are saved in Jesus Christ, not that all men are evil in their hearts. At the most, the latter is an implication from the event of salvation.<sup>3</sup> If

2. Hulme, *Speculations*, pp. 3-71.

3. These assertions require a book to substantiate them, but a few comments must suffice. Barth speaks most eloquently to the first and Brunner has some perceptive comments on the second. Barth insists in his doctrine of election that the primary assertion about man is not his sinfulness but his election to fellowship with God. "The election of grace is the eternal beginning of all the ways and works of God in Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ God in His free grace determines Himself for sinful man and sinful man for Himself. He therefore takes upon Himself the rejection of man with all its consequences, and elects man to participation in His own glory" (*Dogmatics*, II/2, 94). Brunner has some thoughtful words on the subsidiary position of original sin in the noetic order: we know about it as an implication of salvation. Speaking of Rom. 5:12 ff. Brunner says that "Paul's theme is . . . that Christ has conquered death, that He is the bringer of life for all. In order to explain *this* truth Paul refers to the story of the Fall, in order to interpret *one* point in its light: in 'Adam' all are sinners; in Christ, all are redeemed. . . . From the standpoint of Christ as we look backwards we see Humanity as a 'unity' of sinners; when we look forward, from Christ, it is a unity of the redeemed

all men are saved only in Jesus Christ, then it follows that they need salvation and cannot attain it on their own. To take the notion of original sin out of this context is pre-incarnational thinking and results in exactly the sort of pessimism and sense of the tragic we find in Hulme's writings. It is far more Eastern than Christian, and Hulme in fact sees the wheel, the symbol of the futility of existence, as the proper symbol of religion.<sup>4</sup> W. H. Auden, speaking of the modern intellectual's inability to accept traditional Christianity, adds a comment on original sin that fits Hulme perfectly.

With this goes an all too easy acceptance of the Doctrine of Original Sin. But to believe that "I am shapen in iniquity and in sin hath my mother conceived me" without at the same time believing "as in Adam all sleep even so in Christ shall all be made alive" is, of course, not Christianity at all, but simply another variant of the pessimism we find in Homer.<sup>5</sup>

Hulme's view of original sin results in an aesthetic in which the goal of art is to deny the world and man and celebrate the inorganic and eternal, while the heart of Christian doctrine—whether understood as the incarnation of God or the salvation of man—implies just the opposite. It is the central belief of the Christian faith that the divine and the human realms (not the eternal and the inorganic realms) *are* brought into contact, and the mode of contact is human, temporal, and dynamic. The implications of Christianity for art are surely that art should celebrate finite and human reality because it is in this sort of reality that God himself walked in Jesus Christ.

Most of the critics who seize upon original sin do not subscribe to Hulme's philosophy of life and art, but they, like him, tend to take this doctrine out of context and see it as the

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—that is, in so far as they really are in Christ. Only *in Christ*, that is, as believers, do we see the solidarity of sin to which we belong; only in Christ do we know that we are united in His redemption" (Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption, Dogmatics: II*, trans. Olive Wyon [Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1952], p. 99).

4. Hulme, *Speculations*, p. 34.

5. "Religion and the Intellectuals: A Symposium," *Partisan Review*, 17 (1950), 123.

distinctive note of Christianity. The main concern of critics like Eliot, Brooks, and Stewart with original sin is, like Hulme's, the image of man it provides to art. It is the tough-mindedness of the doctrine, the unsentimental insistence that man is evil as well as good, that appeals to them both as realists and as artists or critics. Very simply, this belief about man results in better art—in a poem or novel that is complex, ironical, and paradoxical, reflecting the reality of man as both good and evil. As Wimsatt and Brooks write in their *Literary Criticism*,

the writers of the present history have not been concerned to implicate literary theory with any kind of religious doctrine. It appears to us, however, relevant, as we near our conclusion, at least to confess an opinion that the kind of literary theory which seems to us to emerge the most plausibly from the long history of debates is far more difficult to orient within any of the Platonic or Gnostic ideal world views, or within the Manichaean full dualism and strife of principles, than precisely within the vision of suffering, and optimism, the mystery which are embraced in the religious dogma of the Incarnation.<sup>6</sup>

That a poem or novel that takes the complexity and double-mindedness of men seriously is both better art and closer to what our intuitions tell us seems indisputable, and in the hands of a Cleanth Brooks the notion of original sin is used with a light touch for the purpose of underscoring what our common sense affirms. In his book, *The Hidden God*, Brooks employs Christian discrimination. But his distinction from some other Christian critics becomes luminously clear when, at the outset of his essay on Faulkner, he quotes and refutes a comment by Randall Stewart to the effect that Faulkner is one of our most profound Christian writers. Brooks finds Faulkner to be deeply influenced by Christianity but in a way integral to the intrinsic themes of the novelist's greatest books. Brooks writes that

Faulkner does not consider the natural and instinctive and impulsive as automatically and necessarily good. Here I think rests the best warrant for maintaining that Faulkner holds an orthodox view of man and reality. For his men, at least, cannot be content merely with being natural. They cannot live merely by their in-

6. William K. Wimsatt, Jr., and Cleanth Brooks, *Literary Criticism: A Short History* (New York, 1957), p. 746.



instincts and natural appetites. They must confront the fact of evil. . . . They are constrained to moral choices. They have to undergo a test of their courage, in making and abiding by the choice. They achieve goodness by discipline and effort.<sup>7</sup>

But other critics have a heavier hand. For instance, Randall Stewart commits all the sins to which this type is prone and hence is perhaps too easy a target. In *American Literature and Christian Doctrine*, Stewart sets up five basic dogmas of Christianity but operates primarily with one, original sin. With original sin in hand, he then probes American letters to see where it can be found. He finds it notably present in *Billy Budd* (his stammer is the sign of his imperfection) and egregiously absent from Emerson's works, where man is deified.<sup>8</sup> Thus writers are divided into goodies and baddies depending on their view of man as either fallible and limited (a questionable interpretation of original sin) or noble and perfectible. Stewart admits that the Christian view of man allows for potentialities for good as well as for evil, but such an image of man is closer to Judaic ethicism than it is to Christianity. The primary Christian assertion about man is a religious, not an ethical one: man is the one God loves. Then, and only then, comes the ethical assertion that man is to grow into the stature of his Lord. But for Stewart it is the basic duality of man, his tendencies toward both good and evil, that is the hallmark of Christianity; and it is this emphasis that fixes Stewart's perspective as pre-incarnational and allows him to name as Christian a novelist who is likewise pre-incarnational.

Faulkner embodies and dramatizes the basic Christian concepts so effectively that he can with justice be regarded as one of the most profoundly Christian writers in our time. There is everywhere in his writings the basic premise of Original Sin; everywhere the conflict between the flesh and the spirit. One finds also the necessity of discipline, of trial by fire in the furnace of affliction, of sacrifice and the sacrificial death, of redemption through sacrifice. Man in Faulkner is a heroic, tragic figure.<sup>9</sup>

7. Cleanth Brooks, *The Hidden God: Studies in Hemingway, Faulkner, Yeats, Eliot, and Warren* (New Haven, 1963), p. 30.

8. Randall Stewart, *American Literature and Christian Doctrine* (Baton Rouge, La., 1958), pp. 46-60, 98-102.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 142.

It is only because Stewart operates with a pre-incarnational image of man, one based on original sin, that he is able to suppose that the Christian view of man is of "a heroic, tragic figure."

Stewart's type of relation between Christianity and literature is external and heavy-handed; it emerges from what William F. Lynch calls an "univocal imagination," a mind-set that, blinded to the complexity and detail of existence, imposes one pattern on life and art.

This mentality wishes to reduce and flatten out all of actuality to the terms of its own sameness. It cannot abide the intractable differences, zigzags and surprises of the actual. It is, therefore, impatient, rigid, inflexible, intolerant, and can even be ruthless.<sup>10</sup>

It is this tendency of the doctrinal position to insist on one or another Christian doctrine (and usually the wrong one) as the scalpel for dissecting literature that often renders its criticism wooden and generally unhelpful, because one's perception as a reader is not increased by being informed that Faulkner has and Emerson does not have a Christian view of man. What would be helpful is an analysis of each author's image of man in its full detail and complexity, whether or not it is Christian. In criticism, analysis is usually more helpful than judgment, and the best of the critics who utilize the notion of original sin, such as T. S. Eliot and Cleanth Brooks, concentrate on analysis. For these critics, in fact, the notion of original sin does not explicitly enter their criticism; the understanding of man as good and evil is simply an assumption with which they operate. For Eliot the notion of original sin is necessary for literary reasons, whatever its religious sanctions.

With the disappearance of the idea of Original Sin, with the disappearance of the idea of intense moral struggle, the human beings presented to us both in poetry and in prose fiction today and more patently among the serious writers than in the underworld of letters, tend to become less and less real. It is in fact in moments of moral and spiritual struggle depending upon spiritual sanctions,

10. William F. Lynch, S.J., "Theology and the Imagination III: The Problem of Comedy," *Thought*, 30 (1955), 33.

rather than in those "bewildering minutes" in which we are all very much alike, that men and women come nearest to being real.<sup>11</sup>

There is nothing external or heavy-handed about this sort of comment, but against those of an univocal cast of mind, R. W. B. Lewis makes this trenchant criticism:

This issue is, whether one scrutinizes literature for its univocal formulations or particular historical doctrines one cherishes; or whether one submits for a while to the actual ingredients and the inner movement and growth of a work to see what attitude and insight, including religious attitude and insight, the work itself brings into being.<sup>12</sup>

When one contrasts a comment by John Killinger, a Christian discriminator of the hardiest breed, the consequences of failing to follow Lewis' advice become luminously clear.

From the Christian viewpoint, that literature is undoubtedly best which presents most fully the spiritual presence of Christ himself. At its purest, this is to waive the requirements of art in favor of doctrine or devotion and to upset traditional critical judgments. It means, for example, that such a poorly crafted work as James Street's *The High Calling*, which in addition to being poorly crafted is crudely sentimental, even bathetic, ranks by "Christian" standards as high as Henry James' *The Golden Bowl* or Proust's *The Remembrance of Things Past*.<sup>13</sup>

The externality of the doctrinal position becomes blatant in the efforts of some critics to locate Christ-figures in literature. More often than not the criteria are the external marks of Jesus' historical life, the biographical notes. This sort of enterprise can perhaps be easily dismissed, but another type of exterior relation between Christ and literary figures demands more attention. F. W. Dillistone sees the events of Jesus' life, notably his rejection and suffering, as corresponding "to the general sequence of events which may be traced in the career of every heroic figure who carries out a mission of redemption for his fellow-man." The successive stages in the life of Jesus become "the authentic pattern and

11. T. S. Eliot, *After Strange Gods: A Primer of Modern Heresy* (New York, 1934), p. 46.

12. R. W. B. Lewis, "Hold on Hard to the Huckleberry Bushes," *Sewanee Review*, 67 (1959), 464.

13. John Killinger, *The Failure of Theology in Modern Literature* (New York, 1963), p. 220.



final meaning of the whole manifold variety of human existence."<sup>14</sup> Every authentic man, it seems, must be a little Christ, reduplicating in his own life the redemption wrought in Jesus Christ. Thus, Dillistone finds the Corporal in Faulkner's *A Fable* an authentic Christian image of man. It seems obvious from even a cursory acquaintance with the New Testament that the imitation of Christ in Paul's letters and elsewhere is not a general pattern for human repetition (the work of Jesus was a unique work) but is one of the implications of participating in *his* death and resurrection. Eduard Schweizer in his study of New Testament discipleship insists that the way of Jesus is not "the *example*, in a kind of timelessness, allowing of imitation by all generations at all times,"<sup>15</sup> but his is a unique way. Thus, the content of imitation is not a repetition of the sequence of events in his life, but a putting on of the mind of Christ, summarized in the Great Commandment.<sup>16</sup> If this criterion were used, critics might come up with very different Christ-figures. Faulkner's Christ-figure would be Dilsey, with her unshakable trust in God and love for that family of half-wits and dipsomaniacs, and not Joe Christmas, whose death on a Friday at the hands of wicked men issues in the suggestion of vicarious sacrifice and an apotheosis.

One of the most persuasive and novel approaches to the question of Christ-figures in literature is to be found in R. W. B. Lewis' book, *The Picaresque Saint*. Here he insists that "the life of Christ is not under any circumstances a fit subject for literature,"<sup>17</sup> for as literature is inexorably human, the sinlessness and saintliness of Christ and of Christ-figures do not make for convincing characters. But Lewis finds a number of characters in contemporary novels, who might be called "picaresque saints," to be both types of Christ in their tragic fellowship with suffering humanity and persuasive fictional creations in their roguishness and

14. F. W. Dillistone, *The Novelist and the Passion Story* (New York, 1960), pp. 19, 21.

15. Eduard Schweizer, *Lordship and Discipleship* (London, 1960), p. 77.

16. This notion of imitation is developed under the heading of discipleship in Chapter 3, pp. 124-35.

17. R. W. B. Lewis, *The Picaresque Saint: Representative Figures in Contemporary Fiction* (Philadelphia, 1959), p. 209.

sinfulness. The alcoholic priest in Graham Greene's *The Power and the Glory* illustrates this point. Mauriac points to the same dilemma of creating convincing Christ-figures when he says that authors who have tried to portray saints draw them as "sublime and angelic but not human, whereas their sole chance of success would have lain in concentrating on the wretched and human elements in their characters that sanctity allows to subsist."<sup>18</sup> It is interesting to speculate whether a Christology that was not itself so "sublime and angelic," that allowed Christ to be really human (perhaps even "wretched") might not permit convincing literary embodiments without scandalizing faith.

But Dillistone, Lewis, and Mauriac overlook one problem that all literary imitations of the life of Christ must deal with—the unsubstitutable uniqueness of the man Jesus. Hans W. Frei claims that all Christ-figures fail because they are not, interestingly enough, fully human, fully centered individuals.<sup>19</sup> Christ-figures, from Melville's Billy Budd to Greene's drunken priest, are defined by characteristics of good and evil, but they lack a self in control of these characteristics. If a man is what he *does* and not merely a bundle of qualities, if identity is what one enacts over a lifetime and not simply a composite of love and roguishness (or any other set of contrasts), then the man Jesus is a unique, inimitable self and so is every other man or literary character. Identity is unsubstitutable and nontransferable, and the failure to recognize this, says Frei, is the clue to the failure of literary Christ-figures. Novelists who have attempted Christ-figures substitute a stylized pattern of opposite qualities for the unique identity of their own characters and thereby forfeit the humanity of their creations.

The point is to be made, then, that if one identifies the savior figure with a fully human being, the story cannot be retold by substituting somebody else as the hero of it who is then made to be fully identical with that original person. No matter *who* the savior may be, if he is *a* person, once the identification is made he is *that*

18. François Mauriac, *God and Mammon* (New York, 1936), p. 80.

19. The following discussion is deeply indebted to the appendix of Hans W. Frei's essay, "Reflections on the Gospel Accounts of Jesus' Death and Resurrection" (Unpublished paper, mimeographed).

person and no one else. This must be especially true for that type of fiction which owes so much to the gospel stories in the first place, the novel and the short story, for which a personal figure is unique, particular and unsubstitutable within his equally unique and unsubstitutable circumstances. If such fiction is to remind us of Jesus and tell us his story over again, it must remind us by some other unique, particular person's or people's identity and story.<sup>20</sup>

This most telling critique of Christ-figures indicates that perhaps the most legitimate and fruitful direction for both Christian faith and literature to take is to speak of disciples of Christ rather than imitators of his life. Disciple is a legitimate Christian category involving no suggestion of usurping the unique identity and work of Christ. It provides a fruitful model for the novelist, because a disciple such as Faulkner's Dilsey or Paton's Stephen Kumalo is a fully human person with his own identity and his own story. Neither Dilsey nor Kumalo is merely a stylized pattern of opposite qualities, a pattern which denies the humanity of Christ whom such figures are supposed to imitate as well as their own humanity. Rather, they are fully personal agents who become who they are through what they do—although what they do is alive with "the mind of Christ" and empowered by faith in him. We do learn something about Christ through the broken reflections of him in others' lives, but only *in and through these other lives*. The chameleon quality of Christ, the ability of his spirit to enter a man's life, not by unseating the man, but by qualifying each particular, definite contour of his visage and mien, is caught in a poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins.

... for Christ plays in ten thousand places  
Lovely in limbs and lovely in eyes not his  
To the Father through the features of men's faces.<sup>21</sup>

So far we have considered only Protestant representatives of the doctrinal position, but there are many Roman Catholics who are interested in the relationship between Christian truth and literature. Apart from official censorship of books and films, Catholic criticism often has a refreshingly light

20. Ibid., pp. 53-54.

21. 'As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame,' *A Gerard Manley Hopkins Reader*, ed. John Pick (New York, 1953), p. 19.

touch. If Protestants of the doctrinal position have for the most part failed to respect the integrity of art with their external and heavy-handed approach, the same cannot be said, at least to the same degree, of some Roman Catholic critics. The theological criterion with which the Romans operate is not original sin or Christology, but the Thomistic understanding of nature and grace. The problem with much Catholic fictional writing has been its tendency toward the miraculous and the consequent minimizing of the reality of the natural, though, as several commentators have noted, the Church's understanding of the relation of the natural and the supernatural ought to result in the opposite tendency.<sup>22</sup> That is, grace operates through nature, not in spite of it.

For in order to be true to his calling the Catholic writer needs only to hold up a mirror to the reality that is and take down what he sees. If he has literary skill and the spiritual stature to give correct perspective to human events and human conflicts, the manifestation of God, both in myth and miracle, is bound to follow. It will follow simply because it is there, part of himself, part of humanity and bound up imperishably in every facet and phase and movement of creation.<sup>23</sup>

The assumption here and in the writings of Harold C. Gardiner, S.J., is that if man is depicted, as Gardiner says, "on his own level" and not seen from above (supernaturalism) or from below (naturalism), the portrayal will be consonant with man's supernatural end because nature is "open" to grace and gives off intimations of it.<sup>24</sup> All that Gardiner demands of the image of man in a work is that it be an open-ended one, such as Aristotle's is and Montaigne's is not.

22. Discussions of the relations of the miraculous to the ordinary world, or nature and grace in literature, are frequent among Roman Catholic critics. For various points of view see William F. Lynch, S.J., *Christ and Apollo: The Dimensions of the Literary Imagination* (New York, 1960); Flannery O'Connor, "The Church and the Fiction Writer," *America*, 96 (1957), 733-35; Harold C. Gardiner, S.J., ed., *Fifty Years of the American Novel: A Christian Appraisal* (New York, 1952); Barbara Nauer Folk, "Fiction: A Problem for the Catholic Writer," *Catholic World*, 188 (1958), 105-09; John V. Antush, S.J., "Realism in the Catholic Novel," *Catholic World*, 185 (1957), 276-79.

23. Folk, pp. 108-09.

24. Gardiner, *Fifty Years*, p. 8.

As literature operates parallel to the tenets of natural theology, the Christian critic can rightfully assume that any writer has the equipment to see man as having a spiritual vocation, though what it is and how it is fulfilled are part of revelation.<sup>25</sup>

The convincing aspect of this position is the kind of concrete criticism that emerges from it. In *Fifty Years of the American Novel*, various Roman Catholics operating with this open-ended image of man analyze undogmatically and perceptively the perspective on man in such novelists as Hemingway and Steinbeck. Whatever else one might say about this theological criterion, it does not result in heavy-handed univocal criticism. But there is something disturbing about this criterion, nonetheless. Gardiner quotes with favor a statement by Arthur Machen.

Literature is the expression, through the esthetic medium of words, of the dogmas of the Catholic Church, and that which is in any way out of harmony with these dogmas is not literature. . . . Think of it and you will see, that from a literary standpoint, Catholic dogma is merely the witness, under a special symbolism, of the enduring facts of human nature and the universe; it is merely the voice which tells us distinctly that man is *not* the creature of the drawing room and the Stock Exchange, but a lonely awful soul confronted by the Source of all souls, and you will realize that to make literature it is necessary to be, at all events sub-consciously, Catholic.<sup>26</sup>

This *anima naturaliter Christiana* is as slippery a move as is Tillich's insistence that all serious works of art are crypto-religious. It is too easy and it is unfair. It is too easy because even if open-ended humanism does lead to grace in theory, it does not in practice—in actual, fallen human experience. It is unfair because it does not permit anyone, including the artist, to have any profound views about human life that are not crypto-Catholic. In order to give Aristotle his due as a very perceptive pagan, must we also call him crypto-Catholic?

It is precisely the willingness to let the pagans be pagan that characterizes that sort of Christian discrimination that I have called "moralistic." As behavior is influenced by the

25. Ibid., pp. 6-8.

26. Harold C. Gardiner, S.J., ed., *American Classics Reconsidered: A Christian Appraisal* (New York, 1958), p. 13.



arts, it is necessary that a Christian call a spade a spade and realize what is and is not commensurate with Christian truth. As T. S. Eliot writes:

The common ground between religion and fiction is behaviour. Our religion imposes our ethics, our judgment and criticism of ourselves, and our behaviour toward our fellowman. The fiction that we read affects our behaviour toward our fellowman, affects our patterns of ourselves. . . . The author of a work of imagination is trying to affect us wholly, as human beings, whether he knows it or not; and we are affected by it, as human beings, whether we intend to be or not.<sup>27</sup>

Eliot is by no means a narrow moralist; his concern issues from his profound awareness of the power of art, not from the preciousness of his faith. But there are others whose concern to keep Christians unspotted by the world results in a crass dualism of Christ and culture. L. L. Miller, in his book *The Christian and the World of Unbelief*, sees the Christian as an interplanetary space traveler who comes to earth to colonize the natives! There is no commerce between the world of the Christian and that of secular culture; at the most, the Christian can only use culture in his pilgrimage. Artistic expressions as a manifestation of culture are dangerous companions for the Christian, for "there is always about art an atmosphere of the ornamental and unnecessary."<sup>28</sup> Thus the demand to renounce the world applies particularly to art which is dispensable to the serious Christian life.

Miller's book does not merit extensive treatment, but it is illustrative of the dangers of the moralistic position in general—its tendency to concentrate on the use of art and its effect on the Christian. What often happens is that the task of analyzing what a work is actually about (and hence its possible *real* effect) is skimmed over, and concern is concentrated too soon and too superficially on judgment. As one Christian critic writes, "For the Christian anything other than the Biblical world-view is wrong, fundamentally per-

27. T. S. Eliot, "Religion and Literature," *The New Orpheus: Essays Toward a Christian Poetic*, ed. Nathan A. Scott, Jr. (New York, 1964), pp. 227-28.

28. Libuse Lukas Miller, *The Christian and the World of Unbelief* (New York, 1959), pp. 7, 161.

verted."<sup>29</sup> This statement is questionable, I believe; in any event, there is seldom any real attempt by the moralists to understand what this other world-view might be. The sacrifice of common-sense artistic judgment to which this position can lead is evident in Tolstoy's *What Is Art?* Here Tolstoy extolls as good art, that is, art that increases the feelings of love to God and man, Dickens' novels, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and *Adam Bede*; he condemns *The Divine Comedy*, Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, and most of Shakespeare!<sup>30</sup>

The right motive in all this is the insight that art does in fact influence life and that Christian life is a distinct way of living. But the practitioners operating with this insight have for the most part been extraordinarily insensitive to the integrity of art and overprotective of the Christian soul. Roman Catholic censorship of novels and movies is one indication of where this path can lead.

But it can also lead elsewhere. Beneath the woodenness, externality, and dogmatism of Christian discrimination in both its doctrinal and moralistic forms is a deeper issue, the insistence that "belief" is not an accidental decoration on a work of art any more than it is on a Christian life. A work of art, particularly a literary work, has an implicit outlook on life, just as Christianity embodies an outlook, and the two may not be commensurate. The Christian critic will, as S. L. Bethell says, bring his outlook to bear in his literary judgments, just as a Marxist or Freudian critic will. There are no neutral critics, because literature itself is not merely a pleasant pastime and its field is as broad as life itself, so that "the great controversies about the meaning of life will all be reflected in our literary criticism."<sup>31</sup> Christians have as much right as others with different fundamental persuasions to enter the critical arena with their insight into the great issues of life, to analyze and criticize the insight of a work of art. If Christian discriminators should follow this path, they would of course be doing nothing new, for concern with

29. A. G. Newell, "A Christian Approach to Literature," *Evangelical Quarterly*, 32 (1960), 84.

30. Leo Tolstoy, *What Is Art?*, trans. Aylmer Maude (New York, 1899), pp. 145-52.

31. S. L. Bethell, *Essays on Literary Criticism and the English Tradition* (London, 1948), pp. 53-54.

the belief as well as with the technique of a work has been, until fairly recently, the concern of all literary criticism. It is what George Steiner calls "the old criticism."<sup>32</sup> However, as will become evident later in this chapter, those who have produced the best criticism of this type are not the theologians, but a group of critics who have unabashedly and with considerable technical skill raised again the question of belief in a literary work. There is nothing especially Christian or religious about such belief, unless religion is taken in the broadest sense of "a way of looking at things." If art is valued or interpreted experience, as I believe it is, then there is necessarily commitment in it to a pattern of meaning in experience. This can be called the religious aspect of art if one wishes, but it can just as well be called the human aspect, that is, the point of view or orientation to life that any alive and kicking artist will put into his creation.

### CHRISTIAN AESTHETICS

Another attempt at building an organic relationship between religion and the arts is Christian aesthetics. Such an enterprise is often understood as the construction of a total aesthetics based on Christian presuppositions. However, Amos Wilder appropriately undercuts this interpretation when he writes,

There is, properly speaking, no such thing as a Christian aesthetic. If the term is used, it should be used informally, to throw into relief the contributions that can be made to the problem of aesthetic judgment by the Christian understanding of man and the world.<sup>1</sup>

Christian aesthetics, properly understood, attempts to speak to a fundamental problem of our time—the lack of our basic trust in and celebration of the human, temporal order. It is put very succinctly by Erich Heller as "the consciousness of life's increasing depreciation."<sup>2</sup> It is the problem

32. George Steiner, *Tolstoy or Dostoevsky: An Essay in the Old Criticism* (New York, 1959), p. 6.

1. Wilder, *Theology and Modern Literature*, p. 85.

2. Erich Heller, *The Disinherited Mind: Essays in Modern German Literature and Thought* (New York, 1957), p. ix.



T. S. Eliot epitomizes in his famous phrase, "the dissociation of sensibility," and the one Tillich speaks to in his insistence on the participation of the finite in the infinite, of all finite meaning, beauty, goodness, and being in an ultimate ground. It is the problem of finitude in life and art. If art is always, as Heller says, "the vindication of the worth and value of the world, of life and human experience," if "at heart all poetry is praise and celebration," can art still uphold the value of life and shout its praise "if doubt about the true stature of things invades the very sphere of experience"?<sup>3</sup> Can art fulfill its own function of the celebration of finite reality? Can man find significance in his way of temporality and limitation if finite reality is the only reality there is and if his limitation and temporality get him nowhere? Very simply, finitude cannot sustain itself. As Heller points out in his treatment of Rilke and Nietzsche, the attempt to celebrate finite reality apart from any transcendent reference can lead to the taste of the world turning sour and end in a hatred of the world.

Behind these random comments lies an analysis of our culture as nonsymbolic and unsacramental, rationalistic and reductive. Space exploration to the contrary, we live in a smaller universe than our forefathers, for whom reasons of the heart were as good as those of the head and for whom reality was multileveled and interpenetrating. To an integrated sensibility, the fancies of passion could be yoked together in one image with the syllogism, as in Donne's love sonnets, and the love in the eyes of a Beatrice could be an incarnation of the love of God, as in Dante's experience. If we keep Donne and Dante in mind and glance at our contemporary theater, which is the most mercurial indicator of the sensibilities of a culture, it is difficult to deny that, by contrast, there is "consciousness of life's increasing depreciation." The thoroughly naturalistic and finite-centered drama of Tennessee Williams, for instance, certainly does not celebrate the stature of man and the value of the world, but in its own cannibalistic and incestuous way it is a pathetic cry of despair over man and the world.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 268.

Our first response to such an analysis of our culture may well be acceptance of the indictment but impatience with those solutions that attempt to substitute the ethos of a past climate for our own. Nostalgia for the supposed integrated sensibility of the Middle Ages can be a comforting sedative but hardly a plan of attack on our dissociated sensibilities. And there is a bit of conservatism of one sort or another in many of the Christians who have spoken to this problem in our life and art. T. S. Eliot, Malcolm Ross, Allen Tate, and Erich Heller see the best of all possible worlds as one in which finite reality is naturally and instinctively referred symbolically to infinite reality. The closest approximation to this world for these writers is medieval culture, sometimes dated as pre-Lutheran or pre-Cartesian.<sup>4</sup> Whether medieval culture was in fact what they claim it to be is beside the point; at any rate, the degree to which medieval man had an integrated sensibility was surely a matter of instinct and not of rational plan. Confidence in human life and finite reality is not attained by programs but wells up from the springs of a people's deepest convictions. It is in the atmosphere or it is not there at all. That is why Christian aesthetics, when

4. T. S. Eliot's elevation of Dante and John Donne is but one indication of this conservatism. Another is Malcolm Ross's suggestion that the Protestant revision of Eucharistic dogma had dire consequences for English poetry. The Eucharist, the one symbol that was able to function simultaneously at the levels of the natural, the historical, and the divine and thus permit easy commerce among the levels, was lost (*Poetry and Dogma: The Transfiguration of Eucharistic Symbols in Seventeenth Century English Poetry* [New Brunswick, N.J., 1954], p. viii). Allen Tate's conservatism is evident in his "symbolic imagination," epitomized again in Dante, as the true poetic imagination. "The symbolic imagination conducts an action through analogy, of the human to the divine, of the natural to the supernatural, of the low to the high, of time to eternity" (*The Forlorn Demon: Didactic and Critical Essays* [Chicago, 1953], p. 36). Erich Heller agrees with Ross that the sacramental model of reality was lost during the Reformation and with Tate that it is an essential model for the health of the poetic imagination, but he does not suggest a return to the Middle Ages or a revival of Eucharistic dogma. "What I mean by true order? [sic] An order that embodies the incalculable and unpredictable, transcending our rational grasp precisely where it meets the reasons of the heart. The symbol is the body of that which transcends, the measure of the immeasurable and the visible logic of the heart's reasoning. . . . The order is neither behind us nor before us. It is, or it is not. The sensible movement is in another dimension" (*Disinherited Mind*, pp. 295-96).

it attempts to reintegrate the modern sensibility by admonishing artists that they must either accept the transcendent reference of their symbols or sacrifice all symbolic meaning and finally even the guts of the world, seems a bit like the advice to the agnostic, who wants to believe but cannot, that he had better believe. The contemporary artist, like the agnostic, perhaps knows what is good for him and for his art, but programmatic projections for integrating his sensibility in the way it was done in the past do not speak to his condition.

If Christian aesthetics is to be of service to the arts in our time—and the aim of this type of relation between Christianity and the arts is always to help the arts do their own work—it should change its ways in at least three respects. First, it must become relevant to contemporary understandings of man and the world; that is, it must not project a mode of integration based on a static and nature-oriented sacramentalism but on a dynamic and man-oriented one. Traditional Christian sacramentalism, deriving from Gnosticism and a Johannine Word-flesh Christology, has thought in terms of things that refer to their transcendent counterparts in a static relationship. The pattern is Platonic, two-leveled, and nontemporal. What is needed is an image of integration more closely paralleling the historical, dynamic, and anthropological patterns of contemporary thinking about man and the world. This sort of human sacramentalism would find its roots in the God-man Christology of the Synoptic Gospels and the Antiochene tradition of christological thought. More will be said on this presently, but here we might just mention that at least one contemporary theologian, William F. Lynch, S.J., has made a significant contribution to the development of such a pattern of integration.

Second, Christian aesthetics ought to see its role in relation to the arts in terms of hints rather than directives, in terms of insights informally suggested rather than a full-blown theory of art based on Christian assumptions. Although the term "Christian aesthetics" is often taken to mean a Christian theory of art (and it is in this sense that it raises the red flag), there are in fact very few, if any, full-blown Christian theories, and with good reason. The Christian faith does not

easily lend itself to forming the basis of a complete aesthetics because it is not primarily concerned with the central questions with which any adequate aesthetics must deal.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, to assert that Christian categories are not only adequate to but necessary for an understanding of art is to raise the ghost of theology as queen of the sciences. But theological insights can contribute to aesthetics, perhaps most notably at the point of the image of man with which literary theorists as well as novelists and poets operate.<sup>6</sup> What I have in mind is what Erich Auerbach calls the realism of Christianity—its appreciation of the significance of the mundane, temporal, lowly, but responsible life of man.<sup>7</sup> Traditional aesthetics has not usually operated with this view of man but has seen him more abstractly and statically. Plato and Schopenhauer, given their dualistic metaphysics and their conviction that the really real is the ideal rather than the actual, do not find time, becoming, finitude, and history to be key notions.

5. Most so-called Christian theories of art are oriented mainly toward the creative imagination and do not speak to the other two areas of an adequate aesthetics—the aesthetic object and the function of art. Aesthetic theories as different as those of William F. Lynch and Dorothy L. Sayers, one based on the incarnation and the other on the Trinity, are both aesthetics of the imagination. Lynch says that although Christ can be a "model" for the poetic imagination, reorienting it toward the limited, the finite, and the human, he neither enters formally into the arts nor answers all the questions of aesthetics ("Theology and the Imagination," *Thought*, 29 [1954], 81). Miss Sayers' *The Mind of the Maker* (New York, 1941) is entirely concerned with the creative process. The same is true of Maritain's aesthetics. His notion of "creative intuition," although not based as directly on Christian premises as are Lynch's and Miss Sayers' aesthetics, is heavily influenced by the implications of the humanity of Christ (*Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry* [New York, 1953], pp. 23–31). He, like them, is concerned almost entirely with the creative act, so that even when he is discussing the relation between art and morals he does not speak of it in terms of audience influence, as is often done, but in terms of "the responsibility of the artist" to the demands of his two internal "virtues" or dynamic powers, one oriented toward the beautiful and the other toward the good (*The Responsibility of the Artist* [New York, 1960], p. 15). Whether it is a historical accident or an integral fact, Christian thought seems to be most useful to aesthetic theory at the point of understanding the creative act. It seems least at home in the area of the aesthetic object. It has at times entered the discussion of the function of art, but often, unfortunately, to demand a didactic art or to impose censorship.

6. See Chapter 4, pp. 201–30, for further elaboration.

7. Erich Auerbach, *Dante: Poet of the Secular World*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Chicago, 1961), pp. 14, 177–78.

Longinus and Kant also have something in common, namely, the notion of art as sublime, as pure contemplation of beauty, totally unrelated to the messiness of actual life. A different image of man will result in a different theory—a different view, for instance, of the goal of art. Is it beauty that Longinus called sublimity or is it the depiction of the concrete curves of finite reality? Where the mundanity of man is understood as worthwhile, art is understood as oriented toward this world and no other. Hence, the implications of the fundamental Gestalt of man with which an aesthete operates are enormous.<sup>8</sup> Christian theologians can make a real contribution to aesthetics by throwing their man into the arena and seeing how he stands up to the lions. It is at this point, at the point of basic assumptions about man and the world that underlie any theory of art, that theologians can assist aestheticians to do their own job, and not at the point of the nice and detailed questions of aesthetics proper.

But third, Christian aesthetics cannot simply supply the aesthete or artist with the correct set of assumptions with which he ought to work. That is a matter for his own decision according to conviction. Roy Battenhouse suggests that if the artist would use the "true myth" of Christianity, his art would be better, for better belief or the right perspective on reality results in a better poem or novel.<sup>9</sup> Whether a better poem or novel would result is a moot point.<sup>10</sup> In any case, it

8. See Chapter 2, pp. 90-92.

9. Roy Battenhouse, "The Relation of Theology to Literary Criticism," *Journal of Bible and Religion*, 13 (1945), 19-20.

10. While Battenhouse is a perceptive critic in his insistence that the basic perspective that a novel or play reveals is to be found in its style and not merely in whatever platitudes it may contain, he is somewhat naïve in assuming that better belief results in better art. He wants to offer the Christian myth to the artist as the "full light," the correct perspective on life, and by means of this perspective the artist will produce better art, be a better stylist. This is highly dubious. An interesting discussion of the relations between belief and literature is contained in a series of essays entitled *Literature and Belief*, edited by M. H. Abrams (English Institute Essays, 1957, New York, 1958). While the issue will perhaps always remain an open one, Erich Heller makes a telling point when he says, "There are ideas and beliefs so prosaic, outlandish or perverse in their innermost structure that no great or good poetry can come from them: for instance, Hitler's racialism. It is this *negative* consideration that to me finally proves the intimate *positive* relation



is highly questionable whether an artist can use a set of assumptions in which he does not believe. Where patterns of belief that were intrinsic and natural to other cultures are taken up, as in Joyce's dependence on the Ulysses myth, the use is invariably external; what really inform the work are the atmosphere and assumptions of the artist's own time and his personal convictions, as is surely true of the "belief" in the story of Leopold Bloom. No man can supply another with his basic belief; belief either comes naturally by inheriting the assumptions of a culture or is forged out by hard, lonely work in the creation of a set of assumptions. The most that Christian aesthetics can do is suggest that the Christian assumptions are relevant to the artist as a man and as a workman and leave the matter to his own decision.

The most important of these assumptions has traditionally been the value of finite reality, based on belief in the incarnation. Until post-medieval times it seems that artists could go confidently about their task of celebrating the stature of man and the value of the world because confidence in the worth of the finite order was in the atmosphere. The theological doctrine that upheld this value was the orthodox Christology of Chalcedon. The *assumptio carnis* by the Word means that all of nature is caught up and sanctified by its participation in the Word, so that all things in creation and all artistic expressions celebrating creation are symbols of a transcendent reality as well as realities in their own right. In fact, as Auerbach points out in his magnificent treatment of Dante, the incarnation fixes reality, truth, and meaning in the temporal order, in diametrical opposition to the classical tradition, where the status and the importance of finitude are in doubt. The incarnation resulted in "a universal and universally present spiritualization of the earthly world which however retained its patent sensuous reality."<sup>11</sup>

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between belief, thought and poetry. If there were no relation, there would be no reason either why the most perverse or idiotic beliefs should not be convertible into great poetry. They are not" (*Disinherited Mind*, pp. 158-59). But it does not follow that the best belief results in the best poetry. As T. S. Eliot points out, Shakespeare did as well with the Stoicism of Seneca as Dante did with Thomistic Christianity (*Selected Essays* [New York, 1950], pp. 107-20, 199-237).

11. Auerbach, *Dante*, p. 19.

There is, however, a flaw in this christological pattern for the integration of sensibility, a flaw manifesting itself in Dante's failure, at the point of his most profound portrayals of human reality, to retain both the density of finite reality and its transcendent reference. At the moments when Dante is most realistic, he loses the openness of human reality to its divine ground and merely celebrates the human order. As Auerbach puts it,

the image of man eclipses the image of God. Dante's work made man's Christian-figural being a reality, and destroyed it in the very process of realizing it. . . . In this fulfillment, the figure becomes independent: even in Hell there are great souls, and certain souls in purgatory can for a moment forget the path of purification for the sweetness of a poem, the work of human frailty.<sup>12</sup>

It seems as though orthodox Christology, which supports the significance of the finite order by assuming it into the God-head, lacks the density and dynamism necessary to sanctify the finite order without destroying it. It is too static a pattern and too much oriented to the contours of nature rather than of man to admit the depths and subtleties, the historicity and arbitrariness, the pathos and errancy of human reality. The simplicity and purity of traditional sacramentalism, based on the clean lines of orthodox Christology, do not allow for the intricacies of historical life. As long as men could see themselves on a continuum with nature, with nature as the prime analogue of finite reality, orthodox Christology could serve as a pattern for integration. But since the cosmological way to God has been undercut by a scientific world-view and men have turned inward to the deepest realities of human subjectivity, to themselves as knowers and doers, a different model for integration becomes imperative. The traditional Christology does not permit artists to celebrate the finite order. It does not do so intrinsically, because it always has Docetic tendencies; and it does not do so for our time, because today finitude is understood primarily as anthropological. We will not be convinced by a pattern of integration based on nature that flattens out the density and complexity of human, temporal life.

12. Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, 1953), p. 202.

However, as was mentioned earlier, there is at least one voice crying in this wilderness. William F. Lynch, S.J., points the way toward a pattern for the integration of sensibility along lines that do take the contemporary understanding of man and the world seriously. This pattern, in my opinion, is based on a Christology that is intrinsically preferable to the traditional one, not only because it is relevant to contemporary thinking but also because it is far closer to the New Testament picture of Jesus Christ than is the orthodox view. Lynch's main contention is that Jesus Christ, understood as the God-man who entered fully into the complexity and limitation of human life, can be the model for the artistic imagination in its attempt to arrive "somewhere" by going through the multifariousness of human limitation and temporality.

The order of belief called Christology is a belief in the capacity of the human actual if we imagine and live through it, to lead somewhere. The essential meaning of Christ is that He rejected the way of tricks and magic and power and quick infinities as redeeming ways and chose instead to walk through the mysteries of man (thus I refer to the actualities of man and all the stages of human life) as a way into God. . . . I do not say that Christology must get into the poem or the symbol, but what we may call the Christic act, the act of athletic and confident penetration of limit, of the actual, and the human, can again become the model and energizer for the poetic imagination and for the total act and attitude of any human culture.<sup>13</sup>

The problem to which Lynch speaks is the traditional one of Christian aesthetics—the dissociation of sensibility, characterized in our time by what he calls the "Manichaeian imagination," an imagination that separates the finite from the infinite, retreating into the latter because of lack of confidence that the penetration of the finite will lead anywhere.<sup>14</sup> It is epitomized in what Allen Tate calls "the angelic imagination"<sup>15</sup> and in what Lynch calls Barth's "two vacuums of heaven and earth."<sup>16</sup> Lynch's pattern for reintegrating the

13. William F. Lynch, "Theology and the Imagination II: The Evocative Symbol," *Thought*, 29 (1954-55), 546-47.

14. Lynch, "Theology and the Imagination," pp. 61-86.

15. Allen Tate, *The Man of Letters in the Modern World: Selected Essays 1928-1955* (New York, 1955), pp. 113-31.

16. Lynch, *Christ and Apollo*, p. 10.



modern sensibility is not the traditional Christology, which he rejects as static and nontemporal.<sup>17</sup> Rather, he insists that Christ went the slow and agonizing way *through* the detail and limits of human temporality which led him eventually to the cross and only then to the resurrection. The way to insight (the secular analogue to the resurrection) is *through* the articulated stages of life. It is not a magic, static, or quick way. If this actually is the way Christ went (and the New Testament seems to say it is), then he does serve as a model for the artistic imagination, for, as our greatest writers have always told us, human life is "a process in which one simple moment follows another, in which we take one limited step after another."<sup>18</sup> The structure of a play or novel mirrors this inescapable pattern of human life, for what a play or novel is "about" is not a core of content that can be paraphrased and decorated with details, but the articulation throughout all the joints of the work of what we limply paraphrase. It is about this articulation, just as human life is about the byways and complexities, the stages and mysteries of temporal existence. An artist or any other man who delves into the realities of finite existence with the confidence that finitude does lead somewhere, that the many lead to the One, has what Lynch calls an "analogical imagination."

Lynch's Christian aesthetics may be able to do a service for the arts. It may help to buoy up confidence in the stature of man and the value of human life among those artists who have lost it. Lynch projects a model for the integration of sensibility, the model of Christ as an "athlete running with joy through the whole length and breadth of the human adventure" as the way to the ultimate.<sup>19</sup> It is a model that is both faithful to the New Testament account and relevant to the contemporary understanding of man and the world. He does not offer a full-blown aesthetics and he insists that Christ does not formally enter the arts;<sup>20</sup> rather, Lynch suggests to artists a set of basic assumptions that would both

17. Lynch, "Theology and the Imagination," p. 71.

18. Lynch, *Christ and Apollo*, p. 3.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 176.

20. Lynch, "Theology and the Imagination," p. 81.

give them confidence in and an image of man and the world which could help them to do their own job of celebrating finite reality more joyously and honestly.

This is a real contribution. Lynch's pattern for integration does not rest on a Christology that teeters on the brink of sacrificing the humanity of Christ, as does traditional Christology, or on a view of art in which, as a consequence of this sacrifice, the finite symbol is absorbed into its transcendent reference. Rather, his pattern insists on the humanity of Christ and, for this reason, permits and demands an art that investigates in all detail the muddiness and humor, the dynamism and limitation, the thickness and ambiguity of finite and particularly of human reality.

I have no real quibble with Lynch's understanding of the relation of Christianity and the arts. Its merits so far outweigh its deficiencies that it is the former that ought to be underscored. From the perspective of what Christianity can do for the arts, Lynch's Christian aesthetics is head and shoulders above any other that I have seen. It is somewhat disappointing that Lynch does not see that the relationship might be mutual. That is, it seems obvious that Lynch's Christology has been informed by his acquaintance with dramatic literature. His insistence on the richness, complexity, and temporality of human life, which as Lynch himself admits both our common sense and our greatest writers tell us,<sup>21</sup> is as much an insight gained from the arts as it is the implication of the picture of Jesus Christ in the New Testament and in Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*. In fact, theologians, particularly those involved in christological theory, might benefit from a long hard look at the reality of man as depicted in the arts, for whatever may be the source of what Auerbach calls the Christian realism of Western literature or what Lynch calls "the analogical imagination," it is literature and not Christology that enables us to see concretely what the reality of man's temporal life is all about. But no one does all things, and it would be petty to overlook Lynch's tremendous contribution while criticizing him for what he does not do. It happens that my own primary concern is

21. Lynch, *Christ and Apollo*, p. 3.

neither what Christianity can do for the arts nor what art can do for Christianity but what literature can do for the Christian life.<sup>22</sup>

### THEOLOGICAL CRITICISM

Theological criticism is concerned with the basic perspective, outlook, or belief of a literary work. It is distinct from religious amiability, Christian discrimination, and Christian aesthetics in that the latter are concerned principally with the methodological question of the relation between Christianity and literature, not with criticism of individual novels, plays, or poems. Theological criticism cuts across our three types, for any of the types may furnish the theoretical equipment with which a critic operates, although, as we shall see, a theoretical base is not necessary or even always desirable for such criticism.

There is nothing objectionable in principle about investigation of the belief or outlook that is implicit or explicit in a piece of literature, and much can be said in favor of it when it is conducted in the right way. My objection to the majority of theologians who attempt such criticism is that they do not go about it in the right way. Most come with a set of categories that are extrinsic to the piece of literature under consideration and impose these external categories upon it. This indictment applies equally to Nathan Scott's categories derived from Tillichian theology and to Randall Stewart's doctrinal criteria. R. W. B. Lewis has written a perceptive little essay on theological criticism which speaks directly to this point. He is not opposed to theological criticism as such, but only to this criticism as it is usually practiced, that is, to the propensity of such critics to impose categories rather than submit to the integral religious insights that arise from the work itself. The following two passages are especially pertinent.

22. Chapter 4, pp. 201-30, however, does suggest, along lines similar to Lynch, that Christianity might do a service for literature by offering to novelists, playwrights, and poets its reformulated image of man, a reformulation that is both faithful to the biblical view and relevant to contemporary patterns of thought.

It was . . . characteristic of [Henry] James, as representative of the post-Christian epoch, to have conveyed his religious sense by intensifying the human drama to the moment where it gave off intimations of the sacred. And it was characteristic of him to have done so almost exclusively by the resources of the narrative art, generating the "vision" *within* the developing work of art, and with almost no help from and perhaps very little knowledge or recollection of the traditional doctrines.<sup>1</sup>

The doctrines of Hawthorne and James, of Emerson and Thoreau, of Poe and Melville, like those of their twentieth century followers, are for the most part not received abstractions put into imagistic forms. They are "transcendental worldviews" created by the very play and pressure of the images invoked. They may contain occasionally the essences of some long-gone pieties; but their vitality is new, their foliage original; they flower freshly amidst their own huckleberry bushes.<sup>2</sup>

To do the sort of criticism that is in keeping with these comments about the way a novel or poem manifests a "vision" requires an openness to the intrinsic outlook of the work as well as a sensitivity to the vehicle that carries it—"the play and pressure of the images"—that few theologians possess. I am not saying that theologians could not do excellent theological criticism (or, as I would prefer to say with George Steiner, "old criticism"), but only that their performance is disappointing. It seems to be more or less inevitable that the very quality that makes for good theologians—the ability to see connections between the solitary event of Jesus Christ and everything else—makes for bad critics. Few seem to possess the radical and relaxed openness that will let other outlooks "flower freshly amidst their own huckleberry bushes." Moreover, most theologians lack the technical training that is part of an excellent critic's equipment. This training could presumably be acquired, but, in our age of specialization, it seldom is.

The point is made clearer by a contrast. The reason Erich Auerbach's thesis in *Mimesis* concerning the outlook or belief of Western literature is convincing is that it emerges from the painstaking care of his philologist's hand. The reader is led along the only path that can convince, the way that

1. Lewis, "Hold on Hard to the Huckleberry Bushes," p. 474.

2. Ibid., p. 477.

begins with the details of the language and ends with the generalization that sits like a pinnacle on the pyramid. The pinnacle is secure, but only because everything underneath it is so solid.

Some examples of theologians at work on literature will illustrate the way in which categories imposed from outside swallow up whatever might be the vision of the work lying imbedded in its verbal details. I have chosen as examples only a few of the very best theologian-critics, and my comments do not take into account the possible value of their enterprise for theology or the Christian faith. Presumably they are operating here as critics and their performance should be judged on that basis.

Nicholas Berdyaev's *Dostoevsky: An Interpretation* is in many ways a brilliant book, but it tells the reader more about Berdyaev's philosophy than about the vision internal to Dostoevsky's novels.<sup>3</sup> The categories employed are from Berdyaev's philosophy, and there is little concrete and detailed analysis of the movement of plot and development of characters within the novels themselves. For example, a commentator on Berdyaev's thought emphasizes the centrality of his notion of God-manhood.

The concept *God-Manhood* summarizes the quintessence of Berdyaev's thought. He begins and ends his reasoning not with God or man, but with God *and* man, with the God-man, with Christ and God-manhood.<sup>4</sup>

It is no surprise, then, when we find in Berdyaev's treatment of Dostoevsky the remark that "the whole of Dostoevsky's work is a plea for man, a plea which goes to the length of strife with God, which antinomy is resolved by referring human destiny to Jesus Christ, the God-man."<sup>5</sup> There is little doubt that Berdyaev and Dostoevsky have much in common, but Berdyaev's peculiar exposition of the Russian-Christian notions of freedom, evil, and Jesus Christ, which the two authors shared, dominates and finally buries what is

3. Trans. Donald Attwater (New York, 1934).

4. Evgeny Lampert, "Nicholas Berdyaev," *Modern Christian Revolutionaries*, ed. Donald Attwater (New York, 1947), p. 329.

5. Berdyaev, *Dostoevsky*, p. 39.



distinctive about Dostoevsky's literary rendition of these themes.

At some remove from Berdyaev's Christian philosophy as the criterion of literary criticism is Roland Frye's use of Calvinistic categories in his book, *God, Man, and Satan*. Here the author, using Calvin's notion of "accommodation," finds instruction on Christian faith in Milton's *Paradise Lost* and on the Christian life in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. Frye believes that the truth about God and man can be communicated through great works of the Christian imagination, and hence such works can be a peculiarly effective means of Christian instruction.

We shall approach them in the light of intelligible theological categories, setting up an interaction between the literary works and relevant theological understandings.<sup>6</sup>

Frye is not himself a professional theologian, but his text is heavily theological, sprinkled with quotations from Barth, Tillich, Augustine, and others, which are compared and contrasted with passages from Milton and Bunyan. Granted that both of these literary men make explicit Christian references, there is little doubt that Frye's enterprise contributes more to the imaging of Christian truths for the education of Christians than it does to the examination of the peculiar insights of the works under consideration.

For instance, in the following passage, Frye sums up the Christian view of evil which he then proceeds to illustrate from *Paradise Lost*.

In the Christian conception, then, evil is totally subordinate to God: it is good in its created intention, but perverted from its normative goals. In poetic terms, Satan is a perversion of the great, but subordinate, good, which was Lucifer. As Paul Tillich says, "the demonic is the elevation of something conditional to unconditional significance." It is thus basically a lie, carrying at the core of its existence a falsification of its own nature. As evil itself, it cannot be denied, but must not be made absolute. In its relation to man, its power should not be underestimated, yet in relation to God it is as nothing. It can be intelligently treated, Barth says,

6. Roland M. Frye, *God, Man, and Satan: Patterns of Christian Thought and Life in "Paradise Lost," "Pilgrim's Progress," and the Great Theologians* (Princeton, 1960), p. 3.

only through fantasy and poetry. It is in precisely these terms that Milton does treat it, as he develops a portrait of evil unsurpassed for the profundity of its insight, and for the breadth and balance of its vision.<sup>7</sup>

Frye's method fails to convey the peculiarity of Milton's vision of evil and its contribution to our understanding other than as a splendid example of what the theologians have said more prosaically. His analysis is so ideological that only what Satan "says" is reported; the total character in all his undeniable attractiveness and convincing reality (in contrast to a quite unconvincing Father and Son) is neglected. Milton's Satan is less orthodox and more interesting than Frye's treatment allows him to be.

What I object to in Berdyaev and Frye (both of whom have written interesting and provocative books) is their refusal to let a novel or play hold on hard to its "own huckleberry bushes." Unfortunately, the same criticism must be leveled against a Roman Catholic theologian-critic, William F. Lynch, who as theorist about the relations of Christianity and literature makes some highly provocative suggestions, but as critic falls into the same error as his Protestant brethren. His theology settles heavily over his criticism, so that in his treatment of tragedy, for instance, he does little more than use various tragedies as illustrations of the central thesis of his book, *Christ and Apollo*.

[The] . . . achievement of tragedy has always occurred when the dramatic text has allowed itself to move through human time to the very last point of human finitude and helplessness. Here we have once again a form of the remarkable human law we have discussed, that a kind of infinite is reached by marching through a finite.<sup>8</sup>

It takes him only a dozen pages of casual textual comment to conclude that such is indeed the nature of tragedy per se and of all true tragedies extant. In cavalier fashion he adds, "in the *Antigone*, the *Medea* or the *Seven Against Thebes*, the evidence is the same."<sup>9</sup> What evidence? It is precisely the overdose of theology in such criticism (modern tragedies are

7. Ibid., pp. 22-23.

8. Lynch, *Christ and Apollo*, pp. 66-67.

9. Ibid., p. 68.



written off as examples of the old heresies of Manichaeism and Pelagianism) and the casual textual analyses thrown in for illustrative material that is annoying and unconvincing.

Lynch is a good theologian and a perceptive commentator on the relations between Christianity and literature, but a bad critic. So also is our final example of theologian turned critic, Nathan A. Scott, Jr., the high priest of the religion and art movement. Since he operates with less definite and less Christian categories than do the critics already considered, his work may not merit the same indictment, but an indictment, nevertheless. Scott, along with other critics influenced by Tillich, is a humorless and joyless reader. What he sees wherever he turns in modern literature is despair, alienation, and isolation (spelled out as "absolute," "relational," and "ontological").<sup>10</sup> Negation is everywhere. No one will deny the point that Scott makes; but the reason for his insistence on it, the terms he uses to express it, and his unwillingness to speak of the not insignificant portrayals of joy, love, fun, human fellowship, and animal good spirits in modern novels all raise serious questions about his criticism.

Scott's reason for insisting on the negative aspect of contemporary literature is that he views it as "the vehicle of the 'ultimate concerns' which define the spiritual situation of our age." This situation is, as described above, one of alienation and despair; it presents a question to which the Christian Gospel provides the answer along the lines laid down by Tillich's "method of correlation."<sup>11</sup> His reason, then, for concentrating on negation in literature is an apologetic one and not primarily a literary one. It is useful to Christian evangelism, but he passes it off as a literary judgment. "Indeed," he says, "all the great literature of the modern period might be said to be a literature of metaphysical isolation."<sup>12</sup>

More objectionable still is the language he uses to analyze the negative aspects he finds in literary works, for he superimposes on them terminology from Tillich's theology. Speak-

10. Scott, *Rehearsals of Discomposure*, pp. 1-10.

11. Scott, *Religious Frontier*, pp. ix-xi.

12. Nathan A. Scott, Jr., "The Broken Center: A Definition of the Crisis of Values in Modern Literature," *Chicago Review*, 13 (Summer, 1959), 188.

ing of Kafka, Silone, Lawrence, and Eliot, he writes that these four artists are

"Existential poets," in the sense that they are concerned with "our real existence in all its concreteness, in all its accidental elements, in its freedom and responsibility, in its failure, and in its separation from its true and essential being" (Tillich). In their view man's present life is fundamentally problematic, and so their characters do not, as it were, speak of themselves in the third person but rather, finding themselves strangers and alone in a world in which an original contract with life has been ruptured, live "in the world as in an open field," wrestling constantly with their questionable personal existences in the effort to attain the essential "relation."<sup>13</sup>

The affirmation as well as the negation is finally understood in Tillichian terms, even though Scott has made an impressive effort to understand his poets in their own terms. Speaking of Silone and Eliot, he writes as follows:

They discern . . . the ultimate possibility of a genuine reconciliation with "the mystery of Being"—but a reconciliation that does not involve an annihilation of the particular self, for their understanding of the human situation is based upon the major presupposition of Christian wisdom: namely, as Paul Tillich puts it, that of an *essentially* "undisrupted unity between man and the infinite ground and *telos* of his being—religiously speaking, God."<sup>14</sup>

Scott's summary of what the poets are "really" saying takes the sting out of the peculiar negative or positive vision that is theirs (and not Tillich's).

Finally, Scott never discusses the positive aspects of modern literature, and by positive aspects I do not mean Tillich's "courage of despair" or what Scott calls the "dialectic of estrangement and reconciliation." Rather, I mean the good fun of Faulkner's tales in *The Hamlet* and *The Reivers*, in which humor takes an affirmative perspective on the human situation that is neither godless nor god-affirming; or the animal good spirits of Saul Bellow's *Henderson the Rain King*, which points to a toughness in man at a basic level; or the depiction of the need to belong and *be* loved in Carson McCuller's *The Member of the Wedding* and the closing

13. Scott, *Rehearsals of Discomposure*, p. 10.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 260.

recognition that the most one can hope for is *to love*; or the guilt and atonement in Bernard Malamud's *The Assistant*, which makes misery bearable and creates characters who at the least have fortitude and at the most compassion.

These positive notes in contemporary fiction are humanistic ones. They are neither theonomous nor autonomous in Tillich's terminology. Nor are they for or against God—this question is bracketed. The Christian may well insist that this question cannot in the last analysis be bracketed, but to assume that important literature cannot be written from such a perspective is folly. Otherwise, what does one do with *The Canterbury Tales*, Molière's plays, Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, Austen's novels, and Hemingway's stories and novels?

In one way or another, all the theologian-critics employ some kind of criterion that is not strictly literary. Northrop Frye would include these critics in his list of those who substitute "a critical attitude for criticism," whether it be Marxist, Thomist, neoclassical, Freudian, or some other "determinism."<sup>15</sup> Whatever one may think of Frye's ambitious attempt to outline the rudiments of the "science" of literary criticism, his polemical stance vis-à-vis those who operate through external categories is biting and perceptive.

To subordinate criticism to an externally derived critical attitude is to exaggerate the values in literature than can be related to the external source, whatever it is. It is all too easy to impose on literature an extra-literary schematism, a sort of religio-political color-filter, which makes some poets leap into prominence and others show up as dark and faulty. All that the disinterested critic can do with such a color-filter is to murmur politely that it shows things in a new light and is indeed a most stimulating contribution to criticism. Of course such filtering critics usually imply, and often believe, that they are letting their literary experience speak for itself and are holding their other attitudes in reserve, the coincidence between their critical valuations and their religious or political views being silently gratifying to them but not explicitly forced on the reader. Such independence of criticism from prejudice, however, does not invariably occur even with those who best understand criticism. Of their inferiors the less said the better.<sup>16</sup>

15. Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton, 1957), p. 6.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

The major criticism that I have made against the theologian-critics pertains to their criticism, not their theology. The fault in most cases appears to be that the critic is really a theologian; his interests and abilities are primarily theological, not literary. This fact accounts for some of the excellent work by these men, notably Lynch and Scott, on what might loosely be called "theology of culture." When Lynch suggests to artists and poets that Christianity has a useful pattern to offer them, the model of Christ who reached the infinite or insight only by going through the finite and limited, he is operating as a theologian and a highly provocative one. But the application of this pattern to the creation and criticism of literary works is best left to the poets and critics. Similarly, Nathan Scott, in *The Broken Center*, is primarily a theologian, not a critic. He is concerned with analyzing in our literature and theology what he believes is the central phenomenon of our time—the loss of confidence in temporal, historical existence.

What one feels to be formative in much representative literature of our period is the profound need for a deep restoration of confidence in the stoutness, reliability, and essential healthiness of things of earth.<sup>17</sup>

This is the perceptive statement not of a literary critic but of a theologian, a theologian of culture.

These comments by Lynch and Scott are part of the theological task suggested by the New Testament injunction to "test the spirits to see whether they are of God" (I John 4:1). What is the belief, outlook, or vision in a novel or poem or play, and what is its relationship to the perspective of Christian faith? The first question is the legitimate concern of the literary critic; the second, of the theologian. The theologian ought to prod literary critics into doing the sort of criticism that has always been the glory of the profession—the criticism that dares to suggest *what* a work says through the *way* it says it. And the theologian ought then to take these results as directions for his theology of culture, as indications

17. Nathan A. Scott, Jr., *The Broken Center: Studies in the Theological Horizon of Modern Literature* (New Haven, 1966), p. 19.

for the sort of comment and critique that the Christian faith will make to "the spirits" of the times.

Three critics who have done outstanding theological or "old" criticism are George Steiner, Erich Heller, and Erich Auerbach. These critics assume that a novel or poem is not an esoteric pastime carried on by a few technical experimenters; rather, it is the expression of both the basic values of a culture and the personal orientation of its creator. But the entree into both is painstaking critical exegesis.

George Steiner writes in *Tolstoy or Dostoevsky* that "in works of art are gathered the mythologies of thought, the heroic efforts of the human spirit to impose order and interpretation on the chaos of experience."<sup>18</sup> The belief of a work, its outlook on man and the world, is so intrinsic to it that one must say, Steiner claims, that technique and metaphysics are interdependent. An unsuccessful passage can often be attributed to bad metaphysics and a successful passage or entire novel is often related to the quality of the metaphysics it presupposes. His main point is to show that Tolstoy and Dostoevsky present irreconcilable metaphysics which are incarnate in their contrasting methods of writing fiction. One example of his method of moving from the technical detail to the question of implicit belief must suffice.

The technique of giving even minor characters proper names and of saying something about the lives they lead outside their brief appearance in the novel is simple enough; but the effect is far-reaching. The art of Tolstoy is humanistic; there is in it none of that transformation of human beings into animals or inert objects through which fables, satires, comedies, and naturalistic novels achieve their purposes. Tolstoy revered the integrity of the human person and would not reduce it to a mere implement even in fiction. The methods of Proust offer an illuminating contrast; in the world of Proust minor personages are often left anonymous and they are used in the literal and metaphoric sense. In *Albertine Disparue*, for example, the narrator summons two laundresses to a *maison de passe*. He bids them make love and scrutinizes their every reaction in order to reconstruct imaginatively Albertine's lesbian past. I know of few scenes in modern literature of comparable cruelty. But the horror lies not so much in the action of the two girls or in the *voyeurisme* of the narrator as in the nameless-

18. Steiner, *Tolstoy or Dostoevsky*, p. 6.



ness of the two women, in their metamorphosis into objects deprived of privacy and inherent value. The narrator is totally impassive. He remarks that the two creatures "were unable, by the way, to give me any information; they did not know who Albertine was." Tolstoy could not have written this sentence, and in that incapacity lay much of his greatness. Ultimately, the Tolstoyan approach is the more persuasive. We trust and delight in the reality of Count Ilya Rostov, of his coachman, of Count Orlov and Ilyushka the gipsy dancer. The insubstantiality and degradation of the two laundresses, on the other hand, infect the entire scene with a macabre automatism. We are brought dangerously close to either laughter or disbelief. Like Adam, Tolstoy named the things which passed before him; they live for us still because his own imagination could not think of them as lifeless.<sup>19</sup>

Steiner's willingness to stick his neck out and discuss Tolstoy's and Dostoevsky's metaphysics (demanding more than a little courage in our time) makes for extremely lively criticism, even if one takes issue with his basic premise of the relationship between the quality of belief and the quality of art.

A critic of a somewhat different cast of mind, Erich Heller is equally willing to discuss the basic perspectives of various modern writers, and in his hands the discussion becomes a brilliant capsule of the contemporary Weltanschauung. *The Disinherited Mind* is more than literary criticism, and perhaps it is true that the greatest criticism is always more than criticism.<sup>20</sup> His book is a commentary on the breakdown of the meaningful value structure in Western thought, a structure that was true to experience and thus took the reasons of the heart as seriously as it took those of the head. The modern mind-set, rationalistic and positivistic, is single-mindedly oriented toward finite reality; but this very concentration on empirical reality, to the exclusion of that transcendence which our hearts tell us is the basis of finitude, has resulted in loss of meaning in that reality and despair over the world.

These generalizations, however, are the end result of detailed studies of Goethe, Rilke, Nietzsche, Kafka, and others. Rilke and Nietzsche attempted to restore glory and grandeur to a finitude that had always derived its glory from God, by

19. Ibid., pp. 101-02.

20. The following is a summary of the main argument of the book, particularly of pp. 123-77.



making man and particularly the poet his own creator and redeemer.

In 1898 Rilke notes in the *Tuscan Diary*: "Not for all time will the artist live side by side with ordinary men. As soon as the artist—the more flexible and deeper type among them—becomes rich and virile, as soon as he *lives* what now he merely *dreams*, man will degenerate and gradually die out. The artist is eternity protruding into time." In the *Sonnets to Orpheus* this eternity not merely protrudes, it has arrived. It is the world itself; a world which exists in and through song alone. Song is existence—"Gesang ist Dasein." A god could easily achieve it: "Für den Gott ein Leichtes." But if there are no gods? Then we must become gods ourselves. We? We who hardly *are*? "Wann aber *sind* wir?" Indeed, man must transform and transfigure himself; and in transfiguring himself he will be the redeemer and transfigurer of all existence: "*der Verklärer des Daseins.*"<sup>21</sup>

The experiment by Rilke and Nietzsche ended in retreat from and disgust with a world that apparently could not sustain itself. Without a transcendent reference providing an ordered system of values, "the humblest object or the tiniest shred of experience may unexpectedly become a conductor of infinity," "so that a pair of boots . . . may suddenly become the precariously unstable centre of an otherwise unfocussed universe."<sup>22</sup>

Our third example of old criticism, Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis*, has already become a classic both as literary criticism and as intellectual history, for it is an education in the patterns of thought most fundamental to Western literature. Auerbach's main point is that the mingling of styles, the sublime and the realistic, in postclassical Western letters was the direct result of the new image of man that arose from the pattern of the incarnation.<sup>23</sup> Very simply, the incarnation—God himself in a lowly man—meant that human life in all its problematic, historical, muddy, and humble reality can and must be the focus of the most serious, sublime, and realistic styles. The pattern of the incarnation so pervaded Western literature that it determined the basic style—realism—and the basic image of man—the significance of

21. *Ibid.*, p. 138.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 277, 210.

23. Auerbach, *Mimesis*, p. 41.

individual destiny and historical decision—even up to our own time.

Auerbach's method for bringing his thesis to birth is the epitome of technical virtuosity opening up the implicit belief or outlook of a work. His well-known comparison of Homeric and biblical styles will serve as an illustration. Auerbach makes the point that the biblical story of Abraham and Isaac is "fraught with background," while Homer's *Odyssey* is all "foreground." Such a passage as the following is but one brick in his wall of evidence.

We find the same contrast if we compare the two uses of direct discourse. The personages speak in the Bible story too; but their speech does not serve, as does speech in Homer, to manifest, to externalize thoughts—on the contrary, it serves to indicate thoughts which remain unexpressed. God gives his command in direct discourse, but leaves his motives and his purpose unexpressed: Abraham, receiving the command, says nothing and does what he has been told to do. The conversation between Abraham and Isaac on the way to the place of sacrifice is only an interruption of the heavy silence and makes it all the more burdensome. The two of them, Isaac carrying the wood and Abraham with fire and a knife, "went together." Hesitantly, Isaac ventures to ask about the ram, and Abraham gives the well-known answer. Then the text repeats: "So they went both of them together." Everything remains unexpressed.<sup>24</sup>

It so happens that the three critics we have been considering operate in their criticism (though not necessarily in their personal lives) with a Judaic-Christian pattern of belief, but this fact hardly accounts for the excellence or importance of their work. It is natural that they should deal with the Judaic-Christian tradition, for as another critic, D. S. Savage, has remarked, "the life of Western man stands inescapably in a relationship to the Christian faith which has provided the foundation for his culture and his civilization, so his art is, willy-nilly, positively or negatively, in a similar relationship."<sup>25</sup> It is accidental that these critics happen to be, to one degree or another, sympathetic to the Judaic-Christian pattern of belief. But their sympathy is not crucial. What is

24. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

25. D. S. Savage, *The Withered Branch: Six Studies in the Modern Novel* (London, 1950), p. 15.

crucial is their extraordinary ability to point to the perspective on man and the world in a piece of literature through a detailed analysis of its style. It is this that makes their criticism excellent. And it is this that makes the reading of their criticism an important experience in what Eliot calls the human task of aiming at "a theory of life, or a view of life," a task that can find assistance in the arts when we enlarge and exercise our minds by entertaining the basic thought or belief in a work.<sup>26</sup> Such criticism is perhaps especially important to the Christian who is under obligation to discriminate and refine his basic beliefs toward a more mature understanding.

The sort of criticism that we have been considering here fulfills a basic requirement of all literary criticism—it allows the world-view of a work "to flower freshly amidst [its] own huckleberry bushes."<sup>27</sup> But a critic such as Auerbach does one thing more, for he cultivates those huckleberry bushes with the green thumb of a born gardener, until they yield fruit in abundance. And only a first-rate critic, sensitive to the nuances of style, language, and image, can do this. A theologian (by coincidence) may be such a critic, but it seems more likely, if results are any criterion, that theologians will contribute most to the enterprise of unearthing the basic perspective in a novel or play not through concrete criticism of them, but at the theoretical level of persuading those who are eminently equipped by training and temperament to undertake the task. It means persuading our finest critics that theological or old criticism is both integral to an adequate understanding of a poem or novel and necessary if literature is to fulfill its function in the total human enterprise.

At the opening of this chapter, I indicated that no understanding of the relation of Christianity and literature that failed to respect the integrity of each could possibly be considered adequate. It was for this reason that religious amiability was found wanting—it compromises both the heart

26. T. S. Eliot, "Poetry and Propaganda," *Literary Opinion in America*, ed. Morton Dauwen Zabel (New York, 1951), pp. 102-03.

27. Lewis, "Hold on Hard to the Huckleberry Bushes," p. 477.

of Christianity and the uniqueness of the arts. And it is also for this reason that Christian discrimination was found deficient—while it intends to protect the Christian faith it does so woodenly and externally, and it is all too ready to use literature in the service of Christianity. Christian aesthetics measures up the best to our initial standards, for an outstanding practitioner such as William F. Lynch is able to concentrate on the one aspect of Christianity most relevant to the arts, the incarnation or the person and work of Jesus Christ, in such a way that he compromises neither faith nor art and perceives the potentialities within Christology for the protection and encouragement of the uniqueness of the artistic task.

It would be uncharitable and narrow-minded to insist that there is or can be only one relation between Christianity and literature. But it would be irresponsible not to discriminate and develop the position that seems to me to be the central one. The reason that I cannot say that any position suggested so far is the central one arises from an uneasiness over the understanding of Christianity and/or the arts implicit in the foregoing positions. The substantive questions throughout this study—What is meant by Christianity? and What is meant by art?—have not been answered satisfactorily. To religious amiability, Christianity means the answer to the search for ultimate being; to Christian discrimination, Christianity is a structure of belief, understood either as a set of doctrines or a morality; to Christian aesthetics, Christianity is the incarnation. The first position speaks to the problem of doubt; the second concentrates on one doctrine or a narrow moralism; the third exalts the incarnation. I do not think that any of these is the heart of the Christian faith.

Likewise, the understanding of the nature and function of art in these positions is not satisfactory, though here the sin is largely one of omission rather than of commission. That is, neither religious amiability nor Christian discrimination develops an aesthetics or theory of literature prior to and independently of its discussion of the relation between Christianity and the arts. Tillich's understanding of art is but an extension of his metaphysics; it is most convincing at the theoretical level, where it fits into his scheme of things,

and least convincing in the practical work of criticizing individual works of art. Needless to say, the concern of critics like Eliot and Brooks is entirely on the side of the integrity of literature; however, neither doctrine nor morals generally enters their criticism in an explicit way. But the doctrinal and moralistic critics, unfortunately, are for the most part ill-acquainted with aesthetics and literary theory; they do not see the necessity of pausing to consider the peculiarities of aesthetic apprehension, but push onward to a discussion of the usefulness of art to Christianity. The one position that is consistently concerned with the nature and function of art is Christian aesthetics, although at times the concern to help the arts do their own job has edged over into a program to show them how to do it.

These substantive questions concerning Christianity and the arts are crucial ones, for upon the right answers to them depends not only the integrity of Christianity and literature, but also what I consider the central relationship between them. In fact, these are not two issues but one, for, as I shall try to show, it is only by considering separately and in their own integrity the nature and function of literature and the heart of the Christian faith that we can arrive at the central relation between them. Any relation that compromises either or that does not arise from the integral core of each cannot be the central one.<sup>1</sup> The task of developing a relationship that avoids both these pitfalls will occupy us for the remainder of this essay.

1. Needless to say, the integral core of literature and/or Christianity is both a matter of opinion and a question that no analysis will lay to rest. The attempt is presumptuous and the results are open to debate. However, if the term "integral core" is understood operationally rather than comprehensively and dogmatically, perhaps it is a useful and permissible one.

## CHAPTER 2

# The Nature and Function of Literature

*THE FIRST* obligation of any literary theorist or, more modestly, of anyone who thinks theoretically about literature is to lay his cards on the table.<sup>1</sup> While I would insist that in any study of the relation of literature to Christianity (or to anything else, for that matter) it is important to look first at the nature and function of literature in its own integrity, and while I intend to do so, it would be naïve to assume that anyone approaches this task free of what Eliseo Vivas calls "a guiding body of convictions" or "prejudices."<sup>2</sup> No critic or theorist is neutral, and if his cards are not laid on the table they are inevitably shuffled into the deck. More accurately, there is no pure deck to begin with, for literary theory is simply men thinking about the novels, poems, and plays that they have read and enjoyed. Such thinking will inevitably be tinged and slanted by the general outlook on life or the prejudices of the men who do the thinking.

At first glance, this fact seems regrettable. It means that literary theory is not and cannot be a pure discipline, cut off from the basic issues of life; it means that in weighing the merits of any theory of literature, one must also weigh the

1. The avowal of modesty is no mere formality in the case of what follows. This chapter is not a complete or particularly novel theory of literature. It is based on wide reading and relies heavily on the work of those literary theorists and aestheticians who in my judgment make the best sense out of the phenomenon of aesthetic experience, actual literary works, and the function of literature in the total human enterprise.

2. Eliseo Vivas, *Creation and Discovery: Essays in Criticism and Aesthetics* (New York, 1955), p. 274.



merit of the assumptions about man and the world that pervade it. However, it does not mean that a theory of literature need be deduced from a more inclusive aesthetics done in the grand manner. It need not be part of a metaphysical system, whether that of Plato, Hegel, Kant, Tillich, or Paul Weiss. More often than not in such cases, the resulting aesthetics is more useful in rounding out the philosopher's metaphysics than it is in helping us to understand the nature and function of literature.<sup>3</sup> A body of prejudices is not necessarily a philosophical system, and it need not and ought not to operate as a total pattern from which the nature and role of literature are deduced. Rather, this body of prejudices is the inescapable equipment with which every thoughtful person is endowed as he attempts to think empirically and inductively about various forms of literature with which he is acquainted. The final adjudication of literary theories is surely empirical and not systematic. Our question ought to be "Does this theory help us to understand the novels and poems we know?" not "Does this theory of literature present a coherent pattern that completes a metaphysical system?"

But what is meant by a coherent body of prejudices? For prejudices we could substitute basic assumptions, convictions, or presuppositions about man, society, and the world. They are root beliefs about the way things are, and they are

3. It is to be granted that philosophers are not literary theorists, that they do and ought to operate on a higher level of abstraction and generality, and that there is need for defining and structuring that dimension of being traditionally called "beauty." Nevertheless, an overriding concern with a system and a predominance of categories that did not arise in the first instance from experience with actual works of art can result in some curious distortions that common aesthetic experience seems to refute. In the case of Hegel, for example, art, wedged into the dialectic between religion and philosophy, offers only defective knowledge. Moreover, Hegel's concrete analysis of the epic, tragic, and comic forms is so loaded with his systematic language that the text is almost unintelligible when considered in relation to actual works. For instance, speaking of the epic, he writes as follows: "In this Epic, then, what is inherently established in the cult, the relation of the divine to the human, is set forth and displayed as a whole to consciousness. The content is an 'act' of the essential Being conscious of itself. Acting disturbs the peace of the substance, and awakens the essential Being; and by so doing its simple unity is divided into parts, and opened up into the manifold worlds of natural powers and ethical forces" (G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. J. B. Baillie [2 vols. London, Swan Sonnenschein and Co., Ltd., 1910], 2, 740).

often more akin to an intuition or the "feel" of life than they are to a system of concepts. Yet it is from this intuition or feel that the pattern of convictions is woven. My particular body of prejudices about man and the world is derived from the Christian faith.<sup>4</sup> The basic intuition here is that man is a finite, temporal being, who is set in a real world and whose task it is to understand this world through his insight and make something of himself through his decisions. The main point is that man and his world have a given structure, a structure best suggested by such words as temporal, finite, open, free, and dramatic. The conviction is stated in terms of the form, not the content of reality, for the very reason that from the Christian perspective the unique thing about man in contrast to the natural world is not his given nature but his ability to become something, yet to become something only by taking one step after another. Hence, my basic conviction about the way things are is that reality—man and his world—is a given structure of limit and possibility, the possibility attainable only by going through the limits of time and concrete decision. It is a vision that sees life as inexorably dramatic, with all the ambiguities, complexities, reversals, and doubts of the dramatic genre.

The Christian doctrines that lie behind this conviction are, of course, the doctrines of creation and of the incarnation. The Christian doctrine of creation, in contrast to emanation, insists on the substantiality, significance, and yet inescapable finitude and temporality of man and his world. The doctrine of the incarnation shows concretely that this inescapable finitude and temporality of man is both his structure and his possibility. The pattern or form of Jesus' life, his way of going through and not over or around temporal limitations, is the form of human life. And as in his case the path led to the absolute limit of death and only then to the resurrection (though not by any causal connection), so by analogy human possibility, meaning, and insight come only by going through

4. The form in which these convictions are here expressed is dependent on the writings of William F. Lynch, Cleanth Brooks, and Erich Auerbach. My debt to these three authors in particular is difficult to indicate, for the tone of this entire book has been influenced by their writings.

the thickness of finite existence and never by escaping from it.<sup>5</sup>

It should be obvious that although my convictions derive from Christian faith, they are not religious in nature. These convictions about man and the world, although based on Christian faith, can float free of Christian doctrine and be viewed simply on their own merits, as commensurate or incommensurate with human experience and reality. Thus, I am not slipping in Christianity at the very moment when I proposed to concentrate on literature in its own integrity. It should also be obvious that this body of prejudices is by no means a system from which a theory of literature can be deduced. In fact, it has nothing directly to do with literature and could not supply answers to the questions with which any theory of literature must deal; therefore, we must look at literary works themselves to arrive at a theory about them. Yet, insofar as any theory of literature must deal with the questions of the reality, truth, and significance of literature, our body of prejudices will influence the directions we take at these points. More generally, it must simply be admitted that because literary theory is men thinking about literature and because men always think as total beings (or ought to), their basic assumptions will get into everything they think about, including literature. To the purist, this is regrettable; to the person who wants to see life whole and art as a part of life, it is a necessity.

And in a still more specific way, we are determined in our thinking by the extent and variety of our experience. For no theorist of the arts can speak equally well of them all; his predilections for the plastic arts or music or literature have determined his views. For instance, a theorist whose primary experience has been with music may come up with a significantly different aesthetics than will a person whose experience has been mainly with the novel. This fact is often not acknowledged, and yet it seems clearly to be the case. Extreme expressionism of the Croce-Collingwood variety makes good sense in terms of music but can hardly hold up as a theory for understanding the novel. The reality to which

5. Lynch, *Christ and Apollo*, pp. 51-53.

music refers does seem to be the emotion of the composer; but the same cannot be said, at least to the same degree, of the novel. Likewise, the old theory of imitation, while relevant to realistic painting, is entirely irrelevant to music, except perhaps for program music. There may be aesthetic statements that cover all the arts, but most of the comments by any theorist make the best sense in terms of one of the art forms and less sense in terms of others. When one considers such diverse artistic phenomena as Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* and Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, it is only honest to admit that aesthetics as the attempt to speak about art in general is a pretty shaky business. It is also only honest to admit to the nature of one's own primary aesthetic experience and interest. Mine has been in literature, particularly the novel but also poetry and drama. Therefore I take the novel as my primary art form and view the other art forms more or less on a continuum with it. Understanding literature will be my main concern, but this cannot be done in isolation from the other arts, so at times it will be necessary to move from theory of literature into the more general area of aesthetics.

### THE NOVEL

The novel is about man experiencing. Its generic subject matter is man—the caverns and corners of the human spirit, the relations of men and women in society, the question and clash of man with cosmic powers. That the novel is inexorably man-centered is obviously true of the classic English novel, in which the subject matter is always the relations of men and women in society, but it is also true of the God-intoxicated Dostoevsky (*men* are inquiring after God) and of the nature-intoxicated Melville (whatever that whale is or means, he is tied up with the life of a *man*, Captain Ahab).

But more can be said about the novel than merely that it has a perennial interest in human beings. Because of this interest it has developed a particular image of man, an image comprehensively describable as "dramatic." In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Joyce presents his well-known

distinction of the lyric, epic, and dramatic forms.<sup>1</sup> The determinant in Joyce's distinction is the point of view: in the lyric form the artist presents his image in immediate relation to himself; in the epic form the image is in mediate relation to himself and others; in the dramatic form he presents his image in immediate relation to others. Joyce's distinction is a suggestive one. The epic or mediate point of view assumes a common world between the narrator and the reader, an order that the former celebrates and the latter at least accepts. The lyric form, of course, assumes no such world, for the world offered is admittedly private and demands acceptance as such. But the dramatic form also assumes no common world; the narrator disappears and the point of view is refracted into numerous points of view or alternatives. The dramatic mode is par excellence an art of the possible, not of the actual. No hero is sung and no world is celebrated; the dramatic form has its heroes and suggests worlds, but its heroes are always heroes in the making and its worlds are the ones created out of the systole and diastole of human action. The novel in both its inception and its history has been patterned on the dramatic mode: the classic novel is the quest of the innocent for self-definition.<sup>2</sup> This description fits *Don Quixote*, *Crime and Punishment*, *Heart of Darkness*, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, *Absalom*, *Absalom!*, *The Invisible Man*, *The Adventures of Augie March*, and many more. The lyric image of man puts man under the sway of fate, as Joyce's *Ulysses*, written from the lyric point of view, amply shows; the epic sees man in the hands of providence, as the *Aeneid* illustrates; but the dramatic mode sees man as characterized by destiny. What the characters become is a subtle interplay of event and reaction, plot and subjective response. They are neither determined nor guided nor radically free, but always what

1. James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (New York, 1956), pp. 214-15.

2. Robert Langbaum in *The Poetry of Experience* (New York, 1963) suggests that the distinctive quality of modern poetry is also its dramatic nature. It is "a form imitating not nature or an order of ideas about nature but the structure of experience itself: a poetry of experience" (p. 47). The end of such poetry is not "truth" but "experience," "a total movement of soul, a step forward in self-articulation" (p. 51).



they become is principally their own doing. Thus Erich Auerbach says that Shakespeare's heroes attain their tragic completion when they become "ripe"—the adjective is precisely right.<sup>3</sup> Likewise, Faulkner comments in *Absalom, Absalom!* about Thomas Sutpen that "there was something about a man's destiny (or about the man) that caused the destiny to shape itself to him like his clothes did."<sup>4</sup> And all those attractive, vital people in Dante's *Inferno* were neither determined to this end nor protected from it, but hammered out their own niches in hell through decisions in their earthly lives.<sup>5</sup>

As Erich Auerbach brilliantly points out, the Western literary understanding of human life as dramatic is occasioned by the incarnation of Jesus Christ—if in this man God himself struggled with time, limitation, mundane reality, and concrete conflicts, then this must be the realm of the truly significant. *The Divine Comedy* epitomizes the Christian image of man to Auerbach, but he believes it is also *the* image of man in Western literature.

Dante discovered the European representation (Gestalt) of man . . . not as a remote legendary hero, not as an abstract or anecdotal representative of an ethical type, but man as we know him in his living historical reality, the concrete individual in his unity and wholeness.<sup>6</sup>

The insight that has remained as a constant in Western civilization is

that individual destiny is not meaningless, but is necessarily tragic and significant, and that the whole world context is revealed in it . . . that the individual is indestructible, that the life of the individual on earth is a brief moment of irrevocable decision.<sup>7</sup>

What this dramatic, realistic conception of man means is that the reader of novels is not handed down one image of man but is offered the whole panorama of the human condition. The Western novel is an education in our fellowmen,

3. Auerbach, *Mimesis*, p. 327.

4. William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* (New York, 1951), pp. 245-46.

5. Auerbach, *Dante*, pp. 88-90.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 177.

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 174-75.



in the variety of the powers (natural, human, and supernatural) that mold life, and in the intricacies of human response to these powers. Unlike the lyric and epic images, the image of man operating in our novels has no single content; it merely insists upon the necessity and importance of decisions made within the limits of mundane reality and upon man's responsibility for these decisions. Thus, the content of the image varies with each novel. Each reads the relation between freedom and responsibility differently; each investigates the interior response of man to his world with novel insight; each reveals new aspects of the basic structure of human reality. But all concentrate on man experiencing, so what we have in our novels is an acquaintance with the intricacies and subtleties of the heart of man as he attempts to come to terms with his world. Novels do not give us knowledge that we can generalize into principles, but they do bring us into contact, through the detour of the aesthetic object, with the needs, the joys, the desires, the potentials for good and evil, the success and failure of man as he attempts to become himself. Thus, the image of man in the Western novel is inexorably dramatic, giving us a multitude of concrete images, and also subjective, concentrating not on the world itself, but on the heart of man as he confronts his world.

Another way to say all this is to recall Jacques Maritain's remark "that the novel differs from other forms of art in being directly concerned with the conduct of life itself."<sup>8</sup> A first-rate novel has all the muddiness and mystery of life itself as this or that man attempts to come to terms with it, and yet it also has something more. It has not only ambiguity, but luminosity, what one critic has called "complexity with clarity."<sup>9</sup> Destiny and not merely fate or providence is the milieu of the novel; the intricate lines that have led to the present state of things are untangled sufficiently so that we see (as we seldom see in our own lives) how actions have brought a character to such a pass. He is, in a sense, defined, both to himself and to the reader. The acts of a particular

8. As quoted by Caroline Gordon, *How To Read a Novel* (New York, 1964), p. 17.

9. Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago, 1961), p. 135.

life are laid bare and illuminated for our viewing. In an excellent passage on Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, Caroline Gordon captures the heart of the matter.

How has he contrived "an imitation of life" more lifelike than any of his fellows' achievements? I think it is by so ordering his imitation of life that it corresponds to a picture implicit in the human imagination. In life things don't just happen. They are led up to by other events. There is always more than one sequence of events, and they cross and recross each other until the threads which make up the skein of any one person's fate seem at least to mortal eyes, inextricably tangled. But now and then a man comes along and with what seems almost superhuman insight and endurance succeeds not only in unraveling the skein but in fashioning it into a similitude of life. This play has the sheen, the sparkle, of life but it also has the density, the unpredictability. If we examine the structure closely enough we perceive that it is one of the most complex fabrications ever produced by the human imagination. That is because it imitates life so closely. The events excite our interest, we are convinced that things happened the way Sophocles says they happened, but one reason we believe it is that he doesn't give us a chance to believe anything else. Everything that happens in this play is not only presented in a way that gives us the illusion of life but is prepared for in the way life prepares its effects: by the events that have gone before. And this difficult technical feat is accomplished not once or twice in the action of the play but is being accomplished in every scene, almost in every speech. Everything that happens is related to everything else that has happened and foreshadows what is going to happen. Every incident therefore has a threefold existence: in the past, the present, and the future.<sup>10</sup>

One of our greatest novelists and self-critics, Henry James, is another case in point. James' insistence on dramatization and his employment of special means to that end—his "interval," "scene," and "central consciousness"—are not merely technical matters, but a technique for expressing what he believed to be crucial about human life, its creative and dramatic quality. Life as such, apart from an ordering intelligence, is a muddle.<sup>11</sup> What James gives in his novels is not life but the representation of life, various responses to the muddle rendered in a highly dramatic and subjective way. He puts the reader in direct contact with one individual's

10. Gordon, pp. 47-48.

11. R. P. Blackmur, Introduction to Henry James, *The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces* (New York, 1953), pp. xv, xvii-xviii.

reactions to the chaos and his attempts to make sense out of the chaos. As James writes in *The Art of the Novel*, "the house of fiction has in short not one window, but a million—a number of possible windows."<sup>12</sup> In his novels, James presents us with windows on life, and in most cases the heart of the dramatic representation is the subtle evolution of determinate and unique human beings through their concrete decisions in response to the events that surround them. In *The Wings of the Dove*, for instance, we follow the intricate fabric of event and response that eventuates in the Kate Croy who says, "We shall never be again as we were."<sup>13</sup> At the beginning of the novel, Kate is still an open possibility, an innocent in quest of self-definition, but at the end she has become as determinate as any character in Dante's hell and by the same means—through concrete decisions in mundane life. In this process, the reader becomes acquainted with a set of motivations, fears, needs, and desires that in their concrete depiction become mirrors into the human heart. In this instance, Kate's need of the benefits of money, which Milly has, and Milly's fear of being deprived of love and life, which Kate has, are the emotions upon which the story is woven.

In *The Wings of the Dove*, as in most great Western novels, the main concern is with a dramatic presentation of self-definition. The nature of the novel then is man experiencing: novels give us the infinite possibilities of man's responses to his world in his quest for selfhood. And the function of the novel then in the total human enterprise is to offer new insight into the reality of man. Any aesthetic object offers new insight, by way of its own particulars, into the basic structure of human reality—its structure of temporality, complexity, ambiguity, conflict, resolution, and so on.<sup>14</sup> But novels render this structure in a more direct way than any other art medium does, for in content as well as form they are concerned with man experiencing. So it is about man that we learn from novels. It is not, of course,

12. James, *Art of the Novel*, p. 46.

13. Henry James, *The Wings of the Dove* (New York, 1958), p. 512.

14. For substantiation and elaboration of this point, see pp. 93-102 of this chapter.

man as an abstraction, but this or that particular man, whether his name be Stephen Dedalus, Dilsey, Alyosha, or Joseph K.

We learn through Stephen Dedalus or Dilsey about the structure of human reality, about its essentially dramatic character, about the innuendos of conflict and resolution, freedom and destiny, responsibility and decision, difficulty and complexity that constitute the human quest for selfhood. And we learn about this structure of human experience from the inside, from the mirrors into the hearts of Stephen and Dilsey that the novelist holds up for our contemplation. All this is to say, finally, that novels are an education of a very subtle sort in man experiencing—subtle in at least two respects. The learning that is offered is highly particular and nonprogrammatic. If one is to be educated in human reality through novels, it can come about only through attending with wonder to the intricacies of Stephen's dilemma and of Dilsey's situation. It can also come about only by allowing the mirrors that the novelist holds up to their hearts to find their reflections not in concepts for understanding man or in programs for improving him, but in one's own heightened sensibility to his actuality.

### *AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE*

The novel is about man experiencing. It is about the structure of human experience, about the muddiness and the mystery of becoming a self—not any self but the self that is called Stephen Dedalus or Dilsey or Kate Croy. If this is what the novel is about, what is our theory of the novel or, more generally, our theory of literature? What is the aesthetics that emerges from and substantiates such a view of the novel? As we move back from our experience of reading novels and take a broader and more theoretical perspective on our subject, we see that we must deal with at least three aspects of the novel. Any adequate theory of literature must account for aesthetic experience, its quality and distinctiveness as a mode of apprehension. It must also deal with what the novel or poem is about, whether, in addition to the reality evoked by its own words and images,

it is also about a wider reality. In other words, can we speak of a literary work as offering both knowledge and truth? Finally, any theory of literature must say something about the function of literature in the total human enterprise. The reason that all three of these factors must be considered is succinctly given by Eliseo Vivas in a section of his *Creation and Discovery* on the poetic artifact.

The poetic artifact has been defined . . . in terms of its maker, who brings it about by an act of *creation*; of its *components*, which as the *organized* data of experience make up *the object* of self-sufficient apprehension; and of the unique role or *function* which it plays in the life of man and in culture. . . . An attempt to define poetry by means of one or two of these terms, involves serious risks. To define poetry in terms of the maker alone, to go to the poet's study and nowhere else for our data, is to run almost certain risk of ignoring or misconceiving the function of art. This in turn will tend to blind us to indispensable suggestions that we can get from the effects art has on us for an understanding of its nature. To define art exclusively in terms of itself as aesthetic object, as we are advised by the phenomenologist to do, is to run the risk of failing to grasp subtle objective traits that it possesses and can be perceived only when we are made sensitive to them by a recognition of the activity that put them there and the end they are intended to serve. And to define it in terms of its effects alone is to run the risk of confusing art with other cultural agencies that perform functions somewhat similar to some of the secondary functions that art performs. A complete aesthetic may start with any one of these factors, but it does not give the primacy to its starting point.<sup>1</sup>

It seems to me that the place from which to start is aesthetic experience. It is the most natural place to begin, for as readers and appreciators, we are necessarily limited by our experience, by our concrete encounters with this and with that novel or play. As Kant has well taught us, we cannot jump out of our skins and talk about the aesthetic object or the function of literature apart from the way we have experienced the object or from the way it has influenced us. As theorists we are necessarily relativists. Anyone attempting a theory of literature must therefore view with some sympathy the remarks of B. C. Heyl, a relativist and a linguistic analyst, when he presses for what he calls "volitional" or "empirically descriptive" rather than "real" definitions of

1. Vivas, *Creation and Discovery*, pp. 90-91.



art, for, since words never refer to things but always to conceptions, there are no real definitions. The words about art objects are only about the critic's conceptions. They are not propositions and hence are not true or false but at the most are clear, useful, and relevant.<sup>2</sup> Without getting into a full-blown epistemological argument, it is possible to admit the relativity of any theory of literature and at the same time to insist that the words we use to speak and write about art objects are not only about the critic's conceptions but are also about the artistic phenomena. At the most basic level, the assertion that the *Ding an sich* is not only "there" but is related to our conceptions about it is sheer dogmatism or animal faith. Idealism is the loss of this faith; realism is the naïve perversion of it; linguistic analysis is the bracketing of it. There is, it seems, no theoretical cure for its loss, perversion, or bracketing, but there does seem to be a practical one, for most men assume in their words and actions that reality is patient of the forms and conceptions they press on it, and the theoreticians among us believe that it is more patient of some conceptions than of others; thus judgments of truth and falsity arise.

But along with the necessity is the desirability of starting with aesthetic experience. The perspective of this study is existential (in the simple, nontechnical meaning of that word). It is the perspective of a reader, specifically a Christian reader, as he attempts to understand the significance of literature for his life and thought. And the existential place to start is with his concrete encounters with literature—his aesthetic experience.

Aesthetic experience is common experience. It is a sad commentary on our culture that it is often not recognized as such but is considered to be an esoteric and specialized experience reserved for aesthetes. Aesthetic experience is not necessarily the feelings we have when we read Bellow's *Herzog* or listen to a Brahms symphony. These feelings may not be aesthetic at all. We may, for instance, be reminded of our own sad efforts to cope with life when we read of Herzog's attempts or be lulled into contented musings when we hear

2. B. C. Heyl, *New Bearings in Esthetics and Art Criticism* (New Haven, 1957), pp. 3-19.



Brahms' music. Neither of these feelings qualifies as aesthetic experience. Nor is aesthetic experience limited to any feeling we might have in connection with art objects. It is experience that is basic to man and not limited to hours spent reading novels (even good ones) or listening to music (even string quartets). It has distinctive marks and hence is not *any* feeling we might have when reading or listening. To say that aesthetic experience is constitutive of man is to say that he does not have to be taught to be aesthetic, though of course his aesthetic sensibilities can be refined. There seems to be ample evidence from children that aesthetic experience is basic to man. In fact, aestheticians as different as Maritain and Collingwood turn to children for the purest examples of aesthetic experience.<sup>3</sup> It seems that the process of maturation and daily living dulls the aesthetic mode of apprehension which is natural to us.

A phenomenological description of aesthetic experience will suggest its distinctive qualities, and from the mode we will in turn glean its content. That is, the *way* we experience when we are experiencing aesthetically will indicate *what* we experience. The mode of aesthetic experience can be intimated by the word "wonder." To marvel, to be curious, to be astonished are qualities constitutive of childhood experience, qualities that fade with the necessity of boxing reality into neat patterns for the sake of action and understanding. For an adult to look at human life or the world (or a memory, idea, or any other particular) with wonder requires not only a disruption of usual fixed patterns but a certain daredevil courage, for our patterns provide us with security. But a child does not have many fixed patterns, nor is he concerned with the meaning or use of things; he has the freedom to give his attention disinterestedly and spontaneously. Transposed into adult terms then, the basic aesthetic emotion can be suggested, if not adequately described, as appreciation of or joy in something for its own sake. It is both disinterestedness and passion. It is this combination of intense concern with the object and lack of emotion about its significance to one's own life that characterizes aesthetic experience. One

3. Maritain, *Creative Intuition*, pp. 123-24; R. G. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art* (London, 1955), pp. 234-47.

cares, but impersonally. Aesthetic experience is the willingness to be really open to the uniqueness and newness of something, even if it means tearing up the neat cartography of one's world.

Two examples of the quality of aesthetic experience may help to make our meaning clearer. Martin Buber's famous notion of I-Thou is basically an aesthetic notion. The distinctive note of I-Thou in contrast to I-it relationships is radical openness to the other. The I-Thou experience is a suspended moment, a moment out of time and apart from all concerns of temporal living. In this moment, one breaks through to new knowledge of the other, for one's concern is totally with the other and not with his significance for oneself. What one sees and learns in this moment of suspension may influence one's life or give a different Gestalt to one's world, but that is not the driving thrust of the moment itself. In fact, unless one brackets all other concerns and concentrates on the other apart from his or its significance to oneself, what one sees and learns will be the same old thing and not the new thing that can come about only by being truly open. Another example of aesthetic experience is the common one of absorption in a good novel. We often say that we forget ourselves and do not notice the passage of time because we become so absorbed in the story that we lose our critical perspective for the moment. And we ought to lose it, for only when something is seen for its own sake, only when it is viewed with what Vivas calls "intransitive attention," is it viewed aesthetically.

An aesthetic experience is an experience of rapt attention which involves the intransitive apprehension of an object's immanent meanings and values in their full presentational immediacy.<sup>4</sup>

If the *mode* of aesthetic experience can be described phenomenologically as contemplating something, then what is it that we see by this mode of apprehension?<sup>5</sup> What is the

4. Vivas, *Creation and Discovery*, p. 95.

5. By "contemplating something" I mean of course any particular (or an aspect or characteristic of a particular) that can be demarcated in consciousness, which includes an idea, emotion, or figment of the imagination; a person or an item in the natural world; as well as the structured, "realized" particulars of art objects that are usually called "aes-

distinctive *content* of aesthetic experience? The distinctive note of the mode of aesthetic experience is openness to and concentration on something; the distinctive note of the content of aesthetic experience is fresh insight into the particularity of essence of this thing.

When one concentrates with openness on something, one sees it but sees it anew. It is the peculiar merit of Gerard Manley Hopkins' notion of "inscape" that, as he used it, it suggests both the particularity of a thing and the new pattern or order that emerges from concentration on its essence. For instance, in the line from his poem "Pied Beauty," which runs, "For skies of couple-colour as a brindled cow," he offers a new insight or pattern in nature which is the result of his expressed intuition of the inscape of the sky. Though the pattern or order can be generalized as Hopkins does—

All things counter, original, spare, strange;  
whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)<sup>6</sup>

—the insight is fully present in and arises from the particular inscape. To see a thing in its depths, to see its essence or particularity, is to reorder it, to break through the clichés, the petrification and conventionalization of reality that we force on it for the sake of daily living, toward the discovery of new shapes and order in reality. From intense concentration on the matter at hand comes the novelty; from the passion to follow the exact curve of a thing comes the fresh order one sees in it. The point here is that the novel order arises from the intense concentration on the particular at hand. Thus, insight is dependent upon the definite. This is not to say that the thing presented to us is fully transparent, that it is

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thetic objects." We are here concerned with aesthetic experience as a mode of apprehension, a way of approaching any object of attention (which can, of course, be approached through other modes as well, e.g., the cognitive). We are not specifically concerned with aesthetic experience as usually and more narrowly understood, as experience vis-à-vis aesthetic objects. Therefore, I have deliberately kept the objects of such attention as broad as possible, designating them as "things," in spite of the unfortunate connotations of epistemological realism that this word suggests. Pages 84-102 of this chapter will speak directly of the nature of the "thing" we see when we contemplate works of art, in other words, the nature of the aesthetic object.

6. *Hopkins Reader*, p. 14.

waiting, so to speak, to be "read off." Rather, through the aesthetic mode of apprehending an object of attention, we come to a new understanding of it, new conceptions of it. The rightness of the insight, order, or new vision of the thing depends upon cracking the usual view of the thing by delving deeper into its reality.

The distinctive note of aesthetic experience—openness to and concentration on something with emerging insight into the particularity of this thing—is found not only in those moments when we are engrossed with art objects, but also in a variety of experiences not usually denominated as aesthetic. In fact, the mystique attached to aesthetic experience is effectively undercut when we see how this mode operates in other areas of common life. A backward glance at personal life, the investigations of the historian, and the concentration of the scholar can all be examples, at varying levels, of aesthetic experience.

An old man reviewing his life is looking at it aesthetically when he attempts to set aside the pattern it has assumed for him in order to see the exact curve of each twist and turn in it. His concentration on the particularity of each event, if it is a total and dispassionate openness to the events, may result in a flash of insight that seems to be entirely new and yet, he would claim, is the true structure of the events. By diving beneath the conventions, he not only has discovered a new shape to his reality, but has also created this new shape, for apart from his insight, the order that emerges, although it is "in" the events, would have lain forever dormant.

A historian is operating aesthetically when he attempts to follow the precise curve of events, suspending his initial notions of the meaning of the events so that the pattern or order in them may emerge from the particularity and uniqueness of the events themselves. His eventual interpretation of history is not, of course, simply an imitation of the external events, for that would be merely a factual notation of dates and battles; rather, he would claim, it is what Aristotle calls the imitation of the soul of events or the basic structure that emerges from intense concentration on the particulars. The historian is a creator—or better, perhaps, a midwife—

for he brings to birth, but *only* what his material can bear. The events must be patient of his interpretation.

A scholar attempting to understand Plato's doctrine of forms is thinking aesthetically when he buries himself in the dialogues and goes underground for a while, suspending his inclination to arrive too quickly at the meaning of the doctrine. He allows the words and images of the dialogues to pervade him until one day he sees the pattern emerging which he claims is the result of intense and exact concentration on Plato's words. What he sees is perhaps what no one else has seen (even Plato himself), but he claims that the material will bear his novel interpretation.

These examples of the aesthetic mode of apprehension insist on its universality, but they lack precision. The most intense example of the aesthetic mode of apprehension is, of course, artistic creativity, and while any suggestions about the nature of the artistic process are necessarily hypothetical and tentative, it remains our purest and most precise illustration. It is well known, for instance, that Henry James found the "germs" for his stories and novels in daily conversation, but he did not want to hear too much. James was particularly pleased with *The Portrait of a Lady* because he did so much with so little. The smaller the germ, the better; and from the tiny seed an elaborate, ordered growth takes place.<sup>7</sup> The growth is neither entirely natural nor entirely manipulated but is a subtle combination of allowing the plot and characters to develop as they must and as the author thinks they ought. Or perhaps more accurately, the way an author thinks they ought to develop is derived from the way they must develop. It is a common confession among novelists that a story must be given its head, that it takes on a life of its own, and that an author deviates from this life only at his own literary peril.<sup>8</sup> By looking with openness at the particularity

7. James, *Art of the Novel*, pp. 51-52.

8. In James' *Notebooks*, we find numerous examples of the way in which a story takes the bit in its mouth in spite of the writer's editorial commitments as to length and general development and in spite of the intentions that he formulated as he began to explore the possibilities involved in the initial "germ" from which his creative activity took off. In successive entries we see James gradually discovering the story, and we are able to follow the way in which, as it reveals itself to him, it forces him to alter his plans (Vivas, *Creation and Discovery*, p. 124).



of the emerging plot and characters, by suspending shallow and quick manipulation, an order emerges, intrinsic to the material and yet imposed on it by the author.

Cézanne saw in trees what no one else had seen. He looked at them so long and hard and was endowed with such extraordinary apparatus for seeing the natural world in ways other than the conventional ones, that he gave new shapes to nature. These shapes are novel but not arbitrary; they are not only creations but also discoveries. His paintings can so modify our subsequent conceptions of nature that we can understand what is meant by the adage that life imitates art more than art imitates life. Yet, Cézanne did not attain his creative insight by having nothing to do with trees, but by having everything to do with them, by having so much to do with them that we feel that what he expresses in his cylindrical masses is closer to the essence, particularity, or uniqueness of trees than is our everyday concept of them.

Bartók composing his string quartets is certainly not imitating anything in the natural or human world or even in the mental world. There is, it seems, no idea, emotion, or even fantasy upon which he is concentrating in order to describe its exact curve. Yet a composer does cross out and revise, because somehow what he has is not yet right. There is something—a pattern of tone, a rhythm, a total structure—that he is trying to get into his composition. The “thing” that he is trying to order in musical notes may be purely technical; he may be attempting to plumb the depths of the possibilities of his instruments and the combinations of sounds, but even this is an order to which he can attain only by attending to the particular possibilities and the precise combinations. The creative order that is the final composition is also, he would claim, the right order, for it both reflects the potentialities of sound and brings these sounds to an actuality never dreamt of before.

Throughout our phenomenological analysis of aesthetic experience we have been speaking of this experience for the most part as common experience, making no hard and fast distinctions between such experience as related to art objects and to other objects. The aesthetic is not a quality attached to certain objects, but a frame of mind or mode of apprehen-



sion natural to all men, though certain men have such a high endowment for such apprehension that we call them artists and set them apart from the rest of us. Moreover, certain objects, art objects, have characteristics that are appropriate for evoking aesthetic apprehension and that are not shared by other objects.

The reason art objects can evoke an aesthetic response more readily than other objects is that the art object is a self-sufficient and autonomous object, endowing a particular or thing with fresh order or new insight. "The object of aesthetic apprehension is a self-consistent structure, involving an ordered complex of values of a sensuous, formal, and of an immanently meaningful nature."<sup>9</sup> The art object concentrates attention on itself and on its own peculiar immanent insights. Whereas other objects (ideas, emotions, natural objects, human faces, and so forth) are bound into a nexus of memories and relations, the art object encourages us, though it cannot force us, to look at *it* and, for the time being, at nothing else. It is a world in itself, a complete structural whole, which attracts the wandering eye and mind into intense concentration and through this concentration into an understanding of the novelty and freshness of its immanent meanings.

If the self-sufficiency of the art object is an encouragement to aesthetic experience, so also are its immanent meanings. Whereas other objects have only the value and structure that are theirs potentially and that cultural patterns and ordinary men have brought into actuality, an art object is a highly valued and structured object. It stands out from the common world of objects like a lighthouse beacon in the fog. Scarcely any particular in the experience of ordinary people has been plumbed to its depths, has really been seen so intensely that it takes on new shapes and order for us. But the particulars of art objects have so been seen. They are presented to us ordinary men as already valued, as already perceived in depth, as already investigated to the level of their uniqueness where fresh insight arises.

Thus, we are encouraged to perceive an art object aes-

9. Vivas, *Creation and Discovery*, p. 187.

thetically by its own structure and content. Its self-sufficiency and autonomy attracts us to intense concentration, and its presentation of highly perceived and valued particulars stimulates us to follow the artist's route of investigation of these particulars toward fresh insight. For example, suppose we were to paraphrase Faulkner's novel *The Sound and the Fury*. We might say it is about the decadence and destruction inevitable to Southern aristocracy, given its mores and values. But this is not what the novel is about; it is about the story of Benjy, Quentin, Jason, and Dilsey in their reactions of pathos, despair, greed, and self-sacrifice to their situation. This particular, this intricate situation with precisely these characters, has been investigated in depth until order and insight have arisen from it, until a pattern has emerged that is intrinsic to it and is the right order for this set of particulars. It is not an order that absorbs the four perspectives of the novel, but a movement within these perspectives, from the chaos of Benjy's world to the sanity, light, and love of Dilsey's. We are presented here not with the "Southern problem," a general notion shallowly understood, but with a particular story intensely perceived. If Faulkner's story is to have any real relation to the Southern problem, that is, a relation arising from its own integrity, the relation must be by way of its self-sufficiency and its immanent meanings.

These various illustrations of aesthetic experience—examples covering common experience, artistic creativity, and audience appreciation—are not meant to be a systematic treatment of aesthetic experience, but a phenomenological description of this mode of experience. The analysis does not attempt to deal with substantive questions about the nature of the reality with which literature deals or about the truth of literature. These matters will be treated subsequently. All that we are concerned to point out here is that aesthetic experience is common experience; it is that mode of apprehension characterized by radical openness to and dispassionate interest in something for its own sake; it is that mode of apprehension which, through intense concentration on the particularities of this thing, results in fresh insight into it.

But how does aesthetic apprehension differ from other modes of apprehension, and how is it related to other modes? A good deal has been written recently on the uniqueness of aesthetic experience in protest against attempts to subsume the aesthetic under some other mode, the ethical or religious, as in the writings of Tolstoy and Matthew Arnold, or attempts to relegate it to the limbo of emotional therapy where it would have no edge on reality, as in the early writings of I. A. Richards and such positivists as A. J. Ayer.<sup>10</sup> Those who protest against both maneuvers are justified, for a phenomenological analysis of aesthetic experience clearly shows that this mode of apprehension has its peculiarities and unique contributions and cannot be subsumed under some other mode. Moreover, unless one subscribes to the theory that scientific knowledge exhausts what we can know of reality—and it is sheer dogmatism as well as gross insensitivity to the depths and complexities of the human spirit to do so—there is no reason to relegate aesthetic apprehension to “play therapy.”

Almost every important aesthetician since Kant has some scheme for specifying and differentiating the cognitive, ethical, religious, and aesthetic modes of apprehension. In each case the main concern is to insist that no one mode of

10. For I. A. Richards, an artistic statement is a “pseudo-statement.” It is “a form of words which is justified entirely by its effect in releasing or organising our impulses and attitudes” (“Poetry and Beliefs,” *Critical Essays in Criticism 1920-1948*, ed. R. W. Stallman [New York, 1949], p. 330). A. J. Ayer’s view is similar. “Aesthetic terms are used in exactly the same way as ethical terms. Such aesthetic words as ‘beautiful’ and ‘hideous’ are employed, as ethical words are employed, not to make statements of fact, but simply to express certain feelings and evoke a certain response. It follows, as in ethics, that there is no sense in attributing objective validity to aesthetic judgments, and no possibility of arguing about questions of value in aesthetics, but only about questions of fact. A scientific treatment of aesthetics would show us what in general were the causes of aesthetic feeling, why various societies produced and admired the works of art they did, why taste varies as it does within a society, and so forth. And these are ordinary psychological or sociological questions. . . . We conclude, therefore, that there is nothing in aesthetics, any more than there is in ethics, to justify the view that it embodies a unique type of knowledge. It should now be clear that the only information which we can legitimately derive from the study of aesthetic and moral experiences is information about our own mental and physical make-up” (Alfred Jules Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* [New York, n.d.], pp. 113-14).

apprehension has exclusive rights to reality (however that may be defined) but that each mode offers a unique entree to it not available by other means. Apart from the question of the nature of the reality to which these modes point or which they themselves constitute, there is an amazing unanimity concerning the characteristics of the various modes. To one degree or another most theoreticians would agree that the peculiarity of the aesthetic mode is designated by its drive toward fresh insight into the particular and concrete. For example, for Paul Weiss, aesthetic apprehension is concrete perception into one mode of being, that of existence or space, time, and becoming;<sup>11</sup> for T. M. Greene, it is the apprehension of reality in terms of individuality and value, or particularity in the context of universality;<sup>12</sup> for Ernst Cassirer, it is one of four basic symbolic formations which *are* reality, and it gives concrete knowledge of the inner life or the realm of feeling;<sup>13</sup> for Iredell Jenkins, it is one of three modes by which man runs reality down and is characterized by its presentation of the particularity of things;<sup>14</sup> for Jacques Maritain, it is a "divination" which perceives the secret forms of things or their uniqueness through a subtle interaction of creative intuition and the givenness of existences.<sup>15</sup> Each aesthete also insists that the cognitive, ethical, and religious modes of apprehension have their own peculiar characteristics, and while there are similarities between the aesthetic mode and the others—the aesthetic mode, for instance, is contemplative like the cognitive and yet passionately concerned like the ethical—still each is unique and unsubstitutable.

This sort of analysis takes into account the variety and differentiae of the kinds of statements, whether artistic, scientific, religious, or ethical, that claim to give us both knowledge and truth. But one problem that needs to be

11. Paul Weiss, *The World of Art* (Carbondale, Ill., 1961), pp. 8-10.

12. Theodore M. Greene, *The Arts and the Art of Criticism* (Princeton, 1947), pp. 229-30.

13. Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture* (New York, 1953), pp. 176-217.

14. Iredell Jenkins, *Art and the Human Enterprise* (Cambridge, 1958), pp. 44-48.

15. Maritain, *Creative Intuition*, pp. 31-34.

underscored concerns the unity of these modes of apprehension. The unity is not, I think, either hierarchical or systematic, but existential. That is to say, there is no hierarchy of the modes, as Cassirer's ascending arrangement of myth, religion, art, and science seems to claim, nor is there a common language explaining what they are all "really" talking about, as Tillich's language of being seems to suggest.<sup>16</sup> Rather, each retains its stubborn peculiarities. However, they are modes of *apprehension*; that is, they are ways in which man—and, in each case, this or that man—apprehends reality. Hence, the only possible unity is existential; it is the unity that only this or that man can bring about through the integration of his various entrees into reality. What a man learns from a novel, for instance, may influence his actions, not because there is some intrinsic connection between the aesthetic and ethical modes, but because they are the modes of apprehension of *one* man, and the man may decide to put what he knows of man and the world from his reading into his daily living. The kind of integration that results will be a vital and not a theoretical one, an existential and not a systematic one.

Our phenomenological analysis of aesthetic experience has attempted to describe some of the outstanding characteristics of this common mode of apprehension, to specify the peculiar merits of the arts for heightening aesthetic experience, and to differentiate it from other modes of apprehension. We chose to start with aesthetic experience rather than with the objects of this experience because we have no other entree to anything, including art, except our experience. We chose to treat it phenomenologically in order to avoid constructing a theory unrelated to the facts of common, actual aesthetic experience. Having described phenomenologically the mode of aesthetic experience, it is now time to turn to its object.

16. Cassirer writes that "science is the last step in man's mental development and it may be regarded as the highest and most characteristic attainment of human culture" (*Essay on Man*, p. 261). Tillich, speaking of Expressionism in painting, explains the meaning of the art of Cézanne, van Gogh, and others as follows: "The individual forms of things were dissolved, not in favor of subjective impressions but in favor of objective metaphysical expression. The abyss of Being was to be evoked in lines, colors and plastic forms" (*Religious Situation*, p. 87).



We will be dealing specifically with art objects, because these objects present the greatest possibility of aesthetic experience; we will be concerned with two major issues in regard to these objects: the *referent* of the work of art and the *truth* of the reference.

### THE AESTHETIC OBJECT

Our basic contention has been that the aesthetic mode of apprehension is characterized by wonder or the willingness to suspend all other concerns in openness to the self-sufficiency and immanent meanings of the art object. We stand transfixed; time stops for us; and we give ourselves over to what the art object is about. This phenomenon of aesthetic experience arises from the nature of art objects, from their stubborn refusal to be assimilated into the world of ordinary objects, from their insistence on being little worlds unto themselves.

What then do we see when we experience a novel or a poem aesthetically? First of course we see it. We gain fresh insights into the objects of attention under investigation in this particular novel or poem. We see the new order given to the particularities of the art object before us. In other words, we see the aesthetic object of the novel or poem. The aesthetic object is the primary referent of an art object; it is what an art object is about. A novel or poem is concerned first and foremost with its own reality, with the images, plot, meanings, and so forth that constitute it, and only then, and only by way of its own reality, with reality more broadly defined. Tolstoy's *Anna Karenin*, for instance, is about itself, or rather, about the intricacies and complexities of the story of Anna, Karenin, Vronsky, Levin, and the other characters of the novel. It is about anything else—the problem of rural versus city life or the perennial human dilemma of marital fidelity—only through the detour of its own story.

Our insistence on the preeminence of the aesthetic object as the primary reality of the art object may seem silly and unnecessary, because when we insist that a novel is about its own story, we appear not only to be insisting upon the obvious, but also to be doing a Gertrude Stein: a novel is a



novel is a novel. But the insistence is necessary, particularly with the novel, for novels are obviously *also* about the actual world of nature and history. We are all too ready when reading Tolstoy's novel to say that it is about rural life and adultery. We will have to say something eventually about the relation of the aesthetic object to reality more broadly defined, but the initial reality of the art object must be the aesthetic object. If it were not, then there would be no distinction between art objects and other objects; but our phenomenological analysis has shown that there is a difference. Unlike other objects, the art object is experienced as a self-sufficient object presenting its own highly valued and structured set of particulars. It is this distinctive valuation or new insight or novel shape that initially attracts the eye, not the relationship between this reality and reality more broadly conceived. When we look at a Mondrian abstraction or hear a Bach fugue, we do not ask what it is about except in terms of itself, in terms of the patterns and shapes it gives to the particulars that constitute it. Abstract art and music are good analogues to keep in mind when considering what a novel is about, for like abstract art or music a novel is initially and primarily always about itself.

The insistence that the aesthetic object is the primary reality to which an art object refers is the contribution and strength of the New Critics. These critics insist that, *whatever* may be the reference of a piece of literature to the actual world, unless its intrinsic reality is given primary attention we have not really looked at the poem or novel, but only at its relationship to something else, without grasping fully what we are relating.<sup>1</sup> These critics have found I. A. Richards' *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* a germinal work, particularly his discussion of the "Proper Meaning Superstition." Richards claims that a word does not have a given meaning but attains its meaning from the pressure of its

1. For an important though somewhat extreme perspective on the primary reality of a literary work, see "The Symbolistic Imagination" in Charles Feidelson, Jr., *Symbolism and American Literature* (Chicago, 1953). "To consider the literary work as a piece of language is to regard it as a symbol, autonomous in the sense that it is quite distinct both from the personality of its author and from any world of pure objects, and creative in the sense that it brings into existence its own meaning" (p. 49).

context. Meaning ought not to be understood on a "mosaic" but on an "organic" pattern; words do not mean as discrete units, but meanings are resultants we arrive at through the interplay of the interpretive possibilities of the whole utterance.<sup>2</sup> Metaphor is the heart of the theory, for a metaphor is not merely a comparison illustrating a point whose meaning is already known; it is a creative leap to new meaning through the joining of two contexts which in ordinary thought and speech may have no obvious relation.<sup>3</sup> John Donne's metaphysical analogies are of course prime examples.

Mark but this flea, and mark in this  
How little that which thou deny'st me is;  
It suck'd me first, and now sucks thee,  
And in this flea our two bloods mingled be.  
Thou know'st that this cannot be said  
A sin, nor shame, nor loss of maidenhead;  
Yet this enjoys before it woo,  
And pamper'd, swells with one blood made of two,  
And this, alas, is more than we would do.<sup>4</sup>

Richards' theory indicates that poetic meaning is highly creative and unique. The poetic imagination is not Coleridge's "fancy," which operates with "fixities and definites," receiving its materials ready-made, but his "primary imagination," essentially vital and creative of meaning, reflecting on a finite plane the absolute creative act of God.<sup>5</sup> Richards' theory that metaphor is the heart of human thought, the creation of meaning through fresh associations, is also a metaphysics, for metaphor *is* reality, the only reality we can know. It orders the chaos that lies somewhere, though we know not where, beneath the pyramid of verbal projections.

2. I. A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (New York, 1936), pp. 55-56. While Richards' ideas here are definitely derived from experience with poetry rather than with the novel or drama, his main point is applicable to the understanding of all literature. He is insisting on the uniqueness and novelty of literary meaning in contrast to any paraphrasable "theme" derived from a casual reading.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 93-94.

4. John Donne, *The Complete Poems*, ed. Roger E. Bennett (New York, Hendricks House—Farrar, Straus, 1949), p. 27.

5. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* (London, 1894), p. 144.

Our world is a projected world, shot through with characters lent to it from our own life. . . . "We receive but what we give." The processes of metaphor in language, the exchanges between the meanings of words which we study in explicit verbal metaphors, are super-imposed upon a perceived world which is itself a product of earlier or unwitting metaphor.<sup>6</sup>

Coleridge, Richards, and the New Critics have done literature a real service in insisting on the autonomy of the meanings of a poem. They concentrate our attention where it must always be concentrated—on the immanent meanings of the art object. These are the meanings that are interesting and important; interesting because they attract the eye and the mind by their novelty and important because through them we see new things and not merely the same old thing. In the continuing debate between "imitation" and "expression," the New Critics rightly come down on the side of expression, for it is what is said and the way it is said in the aesthetic object that is crucial, not the reference to a reality outside the artifact. Literature is par excellence an impartation of reality by way of the valuation, ordering, and insight which are the products of creative human penetration into the particulars that constitute its own subject matter. And it is this valuation, this assessment, this ordering that matters first and foremost.

William K. Wimsatt, Jr., and Cleanth Brooks end their *Literary Criticism: A Short History* with a particularly discerning passage.

One of the main lessons of critical history would seem, indeed, to be that the stress of literary theory must fall on the *experience* (subjective and emotive) rather than on the *what*, the object of value so far as that is outside *any* experiencing subject. Yet, for reasons which we have been sketching, this lesson need not be interpreted as relegating the value of poetry to the realm of the whimsical and undebatable. A refraction of light through a crystal tells something about the light, something about the crystal; the refraction itself is a kind of reality, interesting to observe. Let us say that poetry is a kind of reality refracted through subjective responses. This refraction itself is an area of reality. Does the refraction tell us something unique and profound about the reality

6. Richards, *Rhetoric*, pp. 108-09.

beyond itself? We need not actually say much about this for the purposes of a workable poetics. (Much will depend on what we conceive the ultimate character of that reality to be.)<sup>7</sup>

Here the emphasis, quite properly, is on the experience and the expression of the experience, rather than on the object of the experience, considered apart from any subject. As Wimsatt and Brooks insist, this emphasis does not mean that poetics is concerned only with expression, only with the verbal interplay within a poem. What the poem expresses is an experience, and hence it is about something other than itself, for it is the experience of *something*; but it is about this something else only *through the experience* of it, the particular experience expressed in the poem. Another way of putting this would be to say that a poem is about something else only by way of itself, about a wider reality only by way of its own reality. The primary reality to which the poem refers is its own aesthetic object, the subject matter of the poem, which is what the poet is investigating through his experience of it and his expressed insight into it. Eliseo Vivas summarizes this complex very neatly.

"What does the poem mean or say?" What it means is not a world it reflects, or imitates, or represents in illusion, in the sense of a world as envisaged by the mind prior to the poetic activity in the manner in which it is envisaged in poetry. What the poem says or means is the world it reveals or discloses *in and through* itself, a new world, whose features prior to the act of poetic revelation, were concealed from us. . . . What the poem says or means—or, in other words, the object of the poem—is, genetically speaking, the full-bodied, value-freighted, ordered, self-sufficient world it presents to us for the first time.<sup>8</sup>

If, when we read a novel, we agree to see *it* and not something else over, under, or through it, then we must insist that the aesthetic object is the primary reality to which an art object refers. As we concluded from our phenomenological analysis of aesthetic experience, what we see is a structured whole, a little world. Upon dissection of this whole, we discover that it is composed of a thing or particular (whatever can be demarcated in consciousness) delivered to us under

7. Wimsatt and Brooks, *Literary Criticism*, pp. 737-38.

8. Vivas, *Creation and Discovery*, p. 87.

the novelist's apprehension of it, an apprehension marked by a studied concentration on its essence or uniqueness and resulting in fresh insight into it or new shape given to it. This insight is embodied in the medium and is finally inextricable from it, for the aesthetic object is a living whole which cannot be cut into content and form, apprehension and expression, intuition and medium, without tearing apart the ligaments of the organism. Dissection strings out in time what aesthetic experience insists is a nontemporal flash of insight given by way of and only by way of the expression of the insight. We grasp the new insight into the thing through the medium and can never really separate the insight from its expression. The insight is the expression.

We recall the contention of Cleanth Brooks that paraphrasing a poem is a heresy, because it pretends to give the meaning of the poem by separating its content from its form.<sup>9</sup> This is particularly pertinent to the criticism of novels, because the obvious connections of novels with life and their less formal structure encourage readers to ferret out a kernel of content, a plot line or theme, as the meaning of the novel. It is not "art for art's sake" that motivates us to insist on the autonomy of artistic meaning, but "art for life's sake"; aesthetic experience itself testifies that an art object is autonomous, but even beyond that we must consider that if art is to do anything for life, it must do it by way of its own unique nature. If all we want is a general idea or an undifferentiated feeling rather than the concrete testing of the idea or the lived apprehension of the feeling, then we might as well read sermons, essays, or Bartlett's quotations. Literature does not give us ideas or feelings, but an expressed experience of ideas and feelings. What we derive from literature is *fresh insight into these particular expressed ideas and feelings*. Such insight is an end in itself, for aesthetic enjoyment, the insight that arises from intense concentration on the valued entities or subject matter of art objects, is satisfying apart from any relation to life.

Yet we cannot and ought not to rest here. The passage quoted previously from Wimsatt and Brooks ends with the

9. Cleanth Brooks, *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* (New York, 1947), pp. 192-214.



comment that whatever is said about the reference of the aesthetic object to "the reality beyond itself" will depend in large measure upon "what we conceive the ultimate character of that reality to be."<sup>10</sup> When we look at a work of art, we see the aesthetic object first and foremost, but does it also evoke something beyond itself? This question, usually referred to by the formidable phrase "the ontological status of the aesthetic object," is a crucial one, for upon our answer to it depends our conception of the role of literature in the total human enterprise. If literature, for instance, is to be understood as knowledge in some sense rather than mere therapy or pleasure, then it must *also* be relevant to a reality beyond itself. But as Wimsatt and Brooks point out, our answer to the question of reference is largely dependent upon what we conceive the ultimate character of reality to be. At this point there is no possibility of avoiding metaphysics or what we have called earlier a body of prejudices and convictions about the way things are. This body of convictions may be a systematic metaphysics or simply a notion of the quality and exigencies of human life. In fact, it seems to be the case in all theories of art that the understanding of the reality to which the aesthetic object refers is determined by a doctrine of man. This is so because all art and particularly all literature is inexorably man-oriented—the aesthetic object in all the media (to one degree or another) is the expression of a human experience and never merely the imitation of an item in the world. So whatever may be the understanding of a wider reality to which an art object is relevant, it is always reality in relation to man.

A few examples may clarify the point. For R. G. Collingwood, man is characterized by honest and dishonest emotions, so the aesthetic object refers to the emotions both of the artist and of the audience;<sup>11</sup> for Iredell Jenkins, man is that being who must adjust to his environment, so the aesthetic object refers to that environment as one mode of knowing it and coming to terms with it;<sup>12</sup> for I. A. Richards, man is a disorganized nexus of feelings, so the aesthetic

10. Wimsatt and Brooks, *Literary Criticism*, p. 738.

11. Collingwood, *Principles of Art*, pp. 334–36.

12. Jenkins, *Art and the Human Enterprise*, pp. 1–22.



object refers to these feelings by way of patterning them into an equilibrium.<sup>13</sup> T. M. Greene sees man as the searcher for universality or meaning; therefore, the aesthetic object refers to the universals in human experience by way of concrete insight.<sup>14</sup> For Jacques Maritain, man is that being who can find his selfhood only in relation to things, so the aesthetic object refers to the form or secret of things and thus opens to man the possibility of profound self-awareness.<sup>15</sup> The conception of Eliseo Vivas is that man is the creator of whatever value and structure his world has and therefore the aesthetic object refers to the basic structure latent in things in common reality.<sup>16</sup> For Paul Weiss, man is that being who must conquer reality in all its modes through knowledge of them, thus the aesthetic object refers to one of the modes of reality, that of existence.<sup>17</sup> William Lynch sees human life as characterized by its temporality and limitations which nevertheless "gets somewhere," so the aesthetic object refers to the particular and limited in human reality which leads to insight.<sup>18</sup> Cleanth Brooks conceives of man as good and evil, full of contradictions, irresolutions, and paradoxes; for him, the aesthetic object refers to this aspect of human reality and is thus characterized in form and content by metaphor, irony, drama, and paradox.<sup>19</sup>

The reality to which the aesthetic object refers in the aesthetic theories summarized above is in all cases a man-oriented reality, and yet the theories vary widely. In no case, however, could an aesthete mean by "the ultimate character of reality" the epistemological conundrum of the *Ding an sich* or the scientific concept of the atomic constitution of things. We need not ask whether aesthetics is concerned with naked reality, for this concept of reality is a philosophic or scientific abstraction from the ordinary view of reality. By ordinary view I mean the everyday, common reality of hu-

13. I. A. Richards, "Science and Poetry," *Criticism*, ed. Schorer, Miles, and McKenzie, pp. 505-23.

14. Greene, *The Arts*, pp. 242-55.

15. Maritain, *Creative Intuition*, pp. 27-30.

16. Vivas, *Creation and Discovery*, pp. 101-43.

17. Weiss, *World of Art*, pp. 36-40.

18. Lynch, *Theology and the Imagination III*, pp. 18-36.

19. Brooks, *Well Wrought Urn*, pp. 192-214.

man experience—what Vivas calls the “world in which we find our potatoes and our beans.”<sup>20</sup> It is only the hegemony of scientific and positivistic thinking in our time that elevates their abstractions from ordinary reality to be the criteria of reality. If literature does deal with a reality beyond its own aesthetic object, it can only be ultimately the common sense, everyday world and not an abstraction from it made by science, philosophy, or any other mode of apprehension. Art makes its own abstraction from ordinary reality, as do science and philosophy, but the common ground of all is the same, and none ought to be the criterion for another. So whatever we say about the reality to which the aesthetic object refers, we ought always to mean experience, or everyday human reality. In this sense, it is second-level reality, for the reality to which the aesthetic object is related is already valued; it is reality already alive with the human spirit. So far we have not wandered far from the common assumption of most theories that the reality to which the aesthetic object is relevant is valued rather than naked reality, except by insisting that the most obvious reference for the aesthetic object is our common-sense world and not a special area of it, such as the emotions of the artist or audience, or an abstraction from it, such as a mode of being, or the secret of it, such as the hidden forms of things.

But when I try to say more specifically what sort of reference the aesthetic object has to the everyday world, I find myself operating with a body of convictions or a doctrine of man, as does everyone else. And because of this fact there can be no final adjudication of the truth of various theories. The most that a theorist can do is to try to convince others through an analysis of the nature of literature that his understanding of the reality to which the aesthetic object is related is most in keeping with the intrinsic nature of literature. No reputable thinker either reads off the reality to which the aesthetic object is relevant from his basic convictions or derives his convictions from an objective analysis of the aesthetic object; the process is more dialectical and less clean.

20. Vivas, *Creation and Discovery*, p. 188.

But for anyone who wants to see things whole and believes that literature and life are related, there is no other way.

Is there any connection between the reality to which a novel refers—its aesthetic object—and reality more broadly defined? If the aesthetic object is an expressed experience and, as such, partakes in linguistic terms of the complexities of all human experience, then, in its intrinsic nature, it touches on ordinary reality. As Cleanth Brooks rightly says, literature is always about man himself, for it is always a human experience or a testing of some idea, emotion, or event, and hence it reflects the basic dramatic structure of human life with all its richness, ambiguity, and irony.<sup>21</sup> The complexity and difficulty of a good poem—the richness of its images, the ambiguity of its meanings, the irony of its statements—are patterned on experience, but in terms of the *form* of experience. And the novel, because it is always about man both in content and form, has an even more direct relationship with ordinary reality. The novel par excellence is about man experiencing, about the complexities and nuances of man's response to his world in his quest for selfhood.

Literature touches on ordinary reality, then, because it reflects the basic structure of human experience. By the basic structure of human experience, I mean its structure of limit and possibility, the possibility only attained by going through the tensions, conflicts, complexities, and irresolutions within the limits of time and concrete decision. It is, as has been said, a vision of life that sees it as inexorably dramatic with all the confusions, richness, reversals, and uncertainties of the dramatic genre. It is this structure, then, to which the aesthetic object is relevant; it is this pattern that it reflects. The connection between the aesthetic object of a novel and reality more broadly defined is basically a formal one: the point of contact is the new complex order expressed in the aesthetic object and the basic structure of human experience. To put the matter as succinctly as possible, literature is about man experiencing, so the reality to

21. Brooks, *Well Wrought Urn*, p. 256.

which the aesthetic object is relevant is the mode or structure of human experience, and the truth of literature is therefore its adequation to the form of limitation and possibility, conflict and resolution, complexity and insight that is intrinsic to human reality.

The novelist or poet, then, is a truth-teller. He is for the hard reality of life as lived and against all illusion and deception. He is therefore also a celebrator even when critical or ironic, one who says "Yes" to whatever is and "No" to what is not. He is, as Erich Heller says, the one who praises "the worth and value of the world, of life and human experience."<sup>22</sup> As celebrator, he is not necessarily religious or humanistic. A novel or a poem need not worship God or man to be celebrative; it need only insist through the integrity of its own form and expression on the reality of human experience against all sentimentality, falsehood, and shallowness. The novelist or poet praises neither God nor man, but the worth and value of human reality experienced in its true dimensions and depths, shunning all attempts to pauperize, limit, and distort that reality.

The understanding of human life or the doctrine of man presented here is not simply deduced from Christian faith, though Christian faith supplies such a view; it is not solely the witness of experience, though experience supports it; nor is it entirely derived from the nature of aesthetic objects, though they also uphold it. It is based on all three of these sources and thus, I believe, has a cogency which no one source could supply. It is certainly intrinsic to the nature of the novel, for the novel is concerned with the conduct of life, with the drama of self-definition, and therefore with the structure of human life which we have suggested. Not all novels, of course, reflect this structure to the same degree. Tolstoy's *Anna Karenin* reflects the structure of human life more adequately than does Faulkner's *Requiem for a Nun*; the resolution of the latter, Temple Drake's conversion, is too easy and shallow, while the resolution of the former, Anna's suicide, is the inevitable conclusion to the givens of the novel—her personality and her decisions. The judgment that one

22. Heller, *Disinherited Mind*, p. 268.

is too easy and the other inevitable is both an aesthetic and a human judgment: the givens of both the novel and of life join in common conviction.

But other art forms also reflect the structure of human life. The common opinion that complexity, variation, richness, and counterpoint in musical compositions are superior to pretty tunes, sweeping crescendoes of major chords, and unmotivated resolutions is an opinion based in the first instance on the fact that the former sort of music is more interesting not only from a technical point of view, but also because it squares with the structure of human life.<sup>23</sup> We say that the stresses of a piece of music are adequately harmonized, that the masses of a piece of sculpture are balanced, that the tensions of a dance are concluded, that shadings of light and dark in a painting are held in a satisfying equilibrium, that the conflicts of a drama are resolved. These are, of course, technical judgments about what is evoked by the art object. But the words used, although they may belong originally to the language of the arts, are also used analogously to refer to the intrinsic structure of human life. The widespread use of such terms in daily life would seem to indicate that art is indispensable for our understanding of human reality, giving us the very language in which we understand it.

We have suggested that the reality to which the aesthetic object is relevant is the basic structure of human experience. The novel insight or new order that the artist sees in the thing or particular under investigation and that he embodies

23. A theory similar to that developed here is presented in Leonard B. Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning in Music* (Chicago, 1956). Meyer's theory of musical experience is that acquaintance with a particular musical style (within a culture, an era, or even a single work) builds up a definite set of expectations about the progression of sounds; progressions which fulfill the more normal expectations evoke emotions of contentment or joy, while deceptions, delays, or ambiguities in the progression of sounds evoke a more complex emotional response. Such a theory, Meyer points out, can combine the formalist's interest in musical relationships which can be analyzed objectively and the expressionist's interest in the emotions aroused in the listener. If Meyer is correct, the experiencing of music is a matter of living through a complex series of events which involve the hearer by suggesting certain expectations and then work upon his emotions by moving fitfully toward a conclusion.



in his work is, as Brooks says, "a simulacrum of reality,"<sup>24</sup> because it is itself an experience and hence imitates the basic qualities of all human experience—temporality, drama, tension, conflict, paradox, limitation, and so forth. Thus, a work of art does not imitate anything in the world, but whatever its subject matter, it treats it (or ought to treat it) in a way reflecting the basic constituents of human experience. If the reality to which the aesthetic object refers is the form of human experience and not any "thing" in the world, then its truth is its adequation to the basic structure of experience, not its imitation of any given in the natural or human realm. Whatever particular may be under investigation, the truth of the artist's novel insight into it is judged by a formal criterion, the criterion of the basic structure of all human experience of everything—what Brooks calls "a pattern of resolved stresses" or "a pattern of resolutions and harmonizations, developed through a temporal scheme,"<sup>25</sup> what Vivas calls "the dramatic level" of our common-sense world, "the structure of experience as lived."<sup>26</sup>

To stress the relation between the novel order of the aesthetic object and the structure of human experience is, of course, to give weight to the similarity between literature and life rather than to the contribution of literature to life. This can verge on reducing art to life, to the ambiguity and irresolution that the majority of us live in most of the time. But the complexity of great literature is not the muddiness of everyday life; rather, it is a highly ordered and structured complexity that illumines and dispels the chaos of experience. A great work of art is a simulacrum of reality, not reality itself. Its task is to envisage a resolution in simulated action, not to give over to the chaos.<sup>27</sup> The poet's task, as Brooks says, "is finally to unify experience,"<sup>28</sup> to offer a solution in complex but structured linguistic terms to the partially and poorly ordered welter of human existence. Wayne C. Booth, commenting on Dostoevsky, writes that it

24. Brooks, *Well Wrought Urn*, p. 213.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 203.

26. Vivas, *Creation and Discovery*, pp. 121–22.

27. I am indebted to Professor Hans W. Frei of Yale University for the expression of this insight.

28. Brooks, *Well Wrought Urn*, p. 212.



is not ambiguity but "complexity with clarity" that is the achievement of great literature.

If he is clear about where his focus lies, a great artist can of course do some justice to the complexities of the world and still achieve a high degree of emotional involvement. Dostoevski, like Shakespeare, derives some of his pre-eminence from his ability to show what a murky business the moral world really is while still keeping the lines of our moral sympathies clear. His criminals remain deeply sympathetic because he knows, and makes us know, why they are criminals and why they are still sympathetic. Not genuine ambiguity, but rather complexity with clarity, seems to be his secret.<sup>29</sup>

It is this "complexity with clarity" that is our main concern; therefore, we have emphasized the reality of the aesthetic object rather than its reference to reality more broadly conceived. The new structure, insight, or pattern that a novel or poem offers is the reason we value it so highly; but unless this new order has some recognizable relation to reality more broadly conceived, we cannot say that the insights of literature are true as well as interesting and pleasurable. And this we do say. Because an aesthetic object offers knowledge of the structure of human experience by way of the new structure given to its own particulars, there is an intrinsic relationship between the two sorts of reality. The most profound entree that we have into the scope and depth of the structure of human experience is most often not our daily "potatoes and beans" experience, but this experience as reflected in and made lucid by the masterpieces of the Shakespeares and the Tolstoys.

Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* illustrates this understanding of the reality to which the aesthetic object refers and the truth of that reference. This novel is concerned with one man's brush with horror in the recesses of the African jungle. The subject matter as such is not anything out of common experience; scarcely any of us is familiar with this situation. Whatever may be the point of contact between this novel and common experience, it is not primarily the subject matter. But in his novel Conrad investigates this subject matter, this set of particulars, by concentrating intensely on its concrete contours and, by doing so, comes up with a

29. Booth, *Rhetoric of Fiction*, p. 135.

structure or pattern that, while unique to this set of particulars, is also relevant to experience in general. It is both a reflection on experience in general and a revision of it, for while it reflects the basic pattern of human reality—its conflict, limitations, complexity, and so on—it does so by way of itself, by way of its unique and novel pattern of stresses. What we see is one man experiencing, not experience in general; and it is the particular Gestalt of his experience that allows us to see more deeply into the character of human reality. We see the intricate and ambiguous faces that evil presents to one man in one situation, and thus we become acquainted with some particular contours and corners of the structure of experience. Conrad's novel, though it is true to that structure, is not a mere imitation but a fresh vision of it, a new penetration into it and, not directly, but by way of its own aesthetic object, the story of Marlow and the horror he sees at the heart of things. It is the seemingly paradoxical combination of newness and oldness, novelty and recognition, expression and imitation, creation and discovery that is the essence of the contribution of literature to human insight.

The view of the reality and truth of literature that I am suggesting has affinities with both poles of contemporary aesthetic theory, imitation and expressionism. Iredell Jenkins, who attempts to revive and revise the ancient notion of imitation, claims that the aesthetic mode of apprehension gives us the particularity and integrity of things.<sup>30</sup> Eliseo Vivas, a neo-Kantian who has been influenced by expressionism, maintains that the aesthetic mode of apprehension creates for us fresh order and new values.<sup>31</sup> These perspectives on literature need not, of course, be mutually exclusive, and both Jenkins and Vivas acknowledge the necessity of saying both particularity and order, both the thing and my feeling about the thing, both discovery and creation. Jenkins would say that the correct phrasing of the dual concerns is not "This is how *I feel* about such and such," but "This is what such and such presents to a sensitive *human feeling*."<sup>32</sup>

30. Jenkins, *Art and the Human Enterprise*, pp. 33-34.

31. Vivas, *Creation and Discovery*, pp. 117-23.

32. Jenkins, *Art and the Human Enterprise*, p. 100.

Vivas, on the other hand, would say that the "such and such" only attains sufficient structure or order to present itself to a human feeling by the artist's creative plunge which pulls it out of limbo and molds its formlessness into shape.<sup>33</sup>

But neither Jenkins' nor Vivas' understanding of the reality of the aesthetic object is entirely satisfactory. While each of them acknowledges the necessity of both discovery and creation, of both a sense for particularity and fresh insight, neither emphasizes sufficiently the intrinsic relationship between them. Jenkins' stress on the discovery of things in their particularity tends to balance Vivas' equally legitimate insistence that the aesthetic mode of apprehension itself, in some sense, creates the particulars by structuring them anew. Taken together, these positions make good sense of the subtle interaction between discovery and creation. We must say that the aesthetic mode of apprehension attains to fresh insight and order through intense concentration on the thing. To see a thing in its depths is to reorder it. Jenkins' position has the value of underscoring the "looking hard" of aesthetic apprehension; Vivas' position has the merit of emphasizing its insight and novelty. But neither position alone fully recognizes that the "looking hard" is itself creative and that the novelty is dependent on intense concentration.

To be more concrete, let us look for a moment at Gerard Manley Hopkins' "God's Grandeur."

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.

It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;

It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil

Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?

Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;

And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;

And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil  
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;

There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;  
And though the last lights off the black West went

Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs—  
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent

World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.<sup>34</sup>

33. Vivas, pp. 124, 140.

34. *Hopkins Reader*, p. 13.

What is it that Hopkins is imitating? I agree with Jenkins' stress that art is concerned with the uniqueness or essence of a particular or thing (whatever can be demarcated in consciousness), with his notion that the artist looks harder and deeper than other men, but I disagree with his notion that the artist imitates some aspect of reality. If we say that Hopkins is imitating the idea that God sustains the world, that the world is renewed by the spirit of God in spite of man's indifference to God and his destruction of the earth, we have reduced the poem to a generalization. This view does not account sufficiently for the novelty of the poem, for the new insight and order that emerges from close attention to its detail. Hopkins can only be imitating his own unique apprehension of this idea, an apprehension which, of course, cannot be separated from the final, expressed embodiment of it—*this* poem with these precise words and images. This is to say, further, that the poet creates the apprehension at the same time that he discovers it. Jenkins assumes too great a separation between the object imitated and the expressed insight into it; his view verges on the brink of saying that a poet imitates something in some sense already "there" outside the poem and thus undercuts the new insight that art offers.

Vivas, on the other hand, seems to make the poet a creator in a quasi-absolute sense: he wrenches order from the heart of being and becomes the most indispensable builder of the values of a culture. But from where, I would ask, does the poet get the meaning, value, and order? He gets his insight and order from delving deeper and deeper into the thing he is contemplating. In "God's Grandeur," Hopkins attains new insights by delving deeper and deeper into his own notion of the world charged with the glory of God, by letting this notion germinate and develop in his consciousness, by concentrating so hard on its particularity, its unique contours, that the right order for it begins to emerge, an order or structure that is created by every complexity, every allusion, every twist, and every image in the poem and that cannot be separated from it by a paraphrase. His notion, in fact, is only fully known (presumably to himself as well as to us) in the finished product.

What then is this poem about, what knowledge does it give us, and how can we talk about it being true? It is first of all about what it says, about what it evokes through every image and allusion in it, and only then, and in this way, about anything else. The new thing that this poem says, the novel order that Hopkins creates, is what is crucial. The structure or order of this poem is not a theme that can be paraphrased; it can be understood only through every twist and byway of the poem itself. Hopkins delved into the essence or particularity of his notion of the world charged with the grandeur of God and came up with the innumerable nuances and complexities that we find expressed in the poem.

We learn something new then from this poem; but is it true, does it have any connection with common reality? As has been said, the poem does not imitate any *thing* in our world of experience—there is obviously nothing like the informed substance or aesthetic object of this poem. What this poem does imitate is the basic structure of full human experience of anything—its difficulty, richness, complexity. Yet it does not simply reflect this structure; it also gives us a new vision of the complexity and nuances of the human experience of this subject matter, the relation of the world to God, because it reflects this broader structure of human experience *only* through its own structure. So we can say both that the poem is true and that it gives us new knowledge. It is true to human experience because the felt experience of this notion of God and the world, linguistically expressed, is not an easy, sentimental, shallow one. It gives us knowledge because it goes beyond what we already knew before, because it is true to human experience only by the detour of itself, by every novel insight into it.

Poetry, as Wimsatt and Brooks say, is a crystal, refracting the light from beyond through innumerable prisms (its own reality); it is the multivision of poetry that is its truth; it is the fact that it speaks of the light from beyond by way of its own prisms that is its value as new knowledge.<sup>35</sup> The poetry of inclusion, as Brooks puts it, the poetry that creates the richness and many-faceted difficulties and paradoxes of hu-

35. Wimsatt and Brooks, *Literary Criticism*, pp. 737-38.



man life by delving into the depths of that life is the great, the true poetry because it squares with man's true nature and the structure of his experience.<sup>36</sup> Hopkins' poem is great and true because it has this complexity and difficulty; it does not make a simple connection between the world and God (either a negative or a positive one) but explores linguistically some of the intricacies of the connection. Because they are fresh and novel, the connections give us new insight.

We conclude then by recalling that the reality to which the aesthetic object of a work of art refers is primarily itself, the autonomous presentation of new insight or order into the set of particulars that constitute it. But the aesthetic object also has a reference to reality more broadly defined, to the structure of human experience. While the aesthetic object does not imitate this structure, it does both reflect and revise it through expression of novel insight into its own subject matter. The truth of a work of art is both its adequacy to the basic structure of human experience and its correction and deepening of our understanding of this structure, so that we rightly say not only that art is true to life, but that art is more true than life.

### THE FUNCTION OF LITERATURE IN THE HUMAN ENTERPRISE

The question of the role of literature in human life is an aesthetic question, but a secondary one. That is, when we ask about the relevance of literature to man's total life, we are not asking about its meaning or use, as in cognitive or ethical questions, but about the way the aesthetic mode proclaims its significance to man. Jenkins suggests that there are two moments to aesthetic experience: discovery and assimilation.<sup>1</sup> Assimilation, the digestion of the prior moment of discovery, is a necessary constituent of a total aesthetic experience. When the moment of discovery passes, then we move toward asking the question of the relevance of our new insight to life. But the question of the

36. Brooks, *Well Wrought Urn*, p. 256.

1. Jenkins, *Art and the Human Enterprise*, p. 178.



relevance of literature must always be the second question, for if it is the first, if the function of art becomes the context for a discussion of aesthetics, then art is inevitably absorbed into something else. It becomes a means to an end extrinsic to itself; it can become a surrogate for religion as it did for Matthew Arnold, or a substitute for psychoanalysis as in I. A. Richards' early writings, or a means to life adjustment as in John Dewey's aesthetics. The function of literature is a unique function, dependent on the special qualities of the aesthetic object which we have investigated; it is a function that no other mode of apprehension can fulfill and that cannot be absorbed into any other way of knowing.

Now that we have looked at the distinctive quality of aesthetic experience and at the unique nature of the aesthetic object, we can justifiably turn to the question of the role of literature in the total human enterprise. But the nature of its role is directly dependent on our prior discussion, because its role arises naturally from the peculiarities of aesthetic experience and of the aesthetic object. If aesthetic experience is intense concentration on the aesthetic object for its presentation of new insight, then the function of art only can be to give fresh shape and structure, through the detour of its own object, to experience in general. It gives a newness that revises our old ways of looking at things. As the emotion of wonder is the best capsule summary of aesthetic experience, so also it is the best summary of the function of literature, for great art causes men to wonder both in the sense that we marvel at the novelty of the aesthetic object itself and in the sense that through our appreciation of it we question our own usual stereotyped and hackneyed responses. A good novel disturbs us and shakes us up, makes us more reflective and usually more perceptive. It is a contemplative experience, a learning experience that proclaims its relevance to life in subtle but significant ways.

The three basic questions with which we will have to concern ourselves now have already been implied. We must ask about the possibility of the relevance of literature: how can it be a form of learning that is relevant to life, how is the newness that a novel or poem presents related to the oldness of our usual responses? We must also inquire about the

actuality of its role: what is the special role that literary works perform for men? Finally, we must ask about the mode of its influence on men's responses: does literature give new philosophies of life or suggest novel programs of action, or is its influence of a different sort?

Literature can be relevant to life; this is possible because the aesthetic object has a relation to everyday common reality, to the basic structure of human experience, to its structure of temporality, limitation, complexity, ambiguity, conflict, and so on. The reality to which an art object refers is not only itself, its aesthetic object (though this is its primary reality); it is also relevant by way of its aesthetic object to the basic form of all human experience. This crucial point of contact rescues even an abstract painting, which has achieved a balance of contrasting colors or has rested its statement in the asymmetry of conflicting lines of tension, from irrelevancy to life. It also reflects the *Grundform* of human experience. Of course, not all art reflects the structure of human reality, but all good art does, and for this reason there can be no good art that is merely "art for art's sake"—despite the protestations of artists that they are merely investigating the possibilities of their media and have no intentions of being relevant. Intentions aside, if the investigation of technical possibilities results in complex, interesting, difficult, or dramatic patterns, then the aesthetic object is a reflection of human life as we are aware of it, at least in our most honest and profound moments.

The qualification "at least in our most honest and profound moments" indicates that, while literature is a reflection of the basic structure of human life, it is not a reflection of our usual awareness of that structure. In fact, one way that we truly become acquainted with the insides of this structure is through our experiences with art objects. We say that art reflects the basic structure of life not because we first know this structure and then see that this or that novel or play imitates it, but because we recognize in depth what this structure is, as for the first time, only after seeing one aspect of it presented concretely in an aesthetic object. Literary works do not, of course, create the structure *de novo*, but they do bring it to birth. As the novelist or playwright brings

it out of the limbo of the everyday miasma into the light of day, we realize with a flash of insight that the little world of the aesthetic object is both a simulacrum of reality, as Brooks calls it, and the creation of that reality, in the sense that through the aesthetic object we see the true structure of reality and see it profoundly for the first time.

William Golding's novel *Free Fall* is a case in point. It is the story of a young man's search for the exact moment in his life when he became responsible for his actions, the moment when he moved out of the innocence of childhood toward the determinate individual he became. The novel is concerned with a basic pattern in human experience: the intricate meshing of freedom and determinism that issues in what is perhaps best summarized as a man's destiny—what he is, what he makes of himself, and what the forces of life make of him. Theologians have doctrines to analyze this phenomenon, and folk wisdom has its insights on both sides of the enigma—"There but for the grace of God go I" and "A man should make something of himself." But neither the doctrines of the theologians nor the insights of folk wisdom really acquaint us with this pattern of human experience. They merely tell us about it, but Golding's novel gives us a concrete experience of it. And in giving us one particular and unique instance of a man struggling to solve the riddle of his guilt and responsibility, to unravel the lines of his destiny, Golding actually reveals the fabric of human reality. That is to say, he discloses in his story what was previously concealed—the rich and intricate insides of human existence.

In a novel such as this, we see that the possibility of its having a crucial role in the human economy is dependent on its reflection of the root structure of human experience. As we have said earlier, the aesthetic object has a point of contact with ordinary reality. However, its actual or concrete relevance is not its similarity with human life, but its novelty, its correction and deepening of our understanding of the structure of human experience. It is for this reason that we have continually stressed the aesthetic object itself as the reality to which an art object refers, the primacy of expression over imitation, the emotion of wonder in aesthetic

experience, the quality of new insight embodied in the aesthetic object. Literature can be relevant to the total human enterprise because the aesthetic object in its own integrity mirrors the most basic pattern of human experience, but it is actually relevant in its disruption and revision of that pattern through the novel structure given to the particulars of its own aesthetic object. So the place at which to focus our attention when we speak of the function of literature is the new insight of the aesthetic object, not the similarity of its patterning of experience with experience in general.

We see then that the special role that literature performs is basically one of awakening our faculties of perception and of revising our usual ways of looking at things. In the broadest sense, literature gives us "new sight." The problem in the human condition to which art speaks is the dull, stereotyped, narrow, cliché-ridden understanding of the structure of human experience that most of us are prone to much of the time. For purposes of daily living we pack our world into neat boxes, bracketing off whatever does not fit into our stereotypes of human experience. But literature disrupts these stereotypes.

There are various ways of expressing the nature of art's special role of disrupting our hackneyed responses. To Lionel Trilling, literature is significant to man because it is "the human activity that takes the fullest and most precise account of variousness, possibility, complexity, and difficulty."<sup>2</sup> Allen Tate agrees with Trilling when he writes that poetry is a rejection of easy solutions and partial formulas, insisting as it does on the complexity, irresolution, and antinomies of life as actually lived.

Poetry finds its true usefulness in its perfect inutility, a focus of repose for the will-driven intellect that constantly shakes the equilibrium of persons and societies with its unrelieved imposition of partial formulas upon the world.<sup>3</sup>

Literature has a contemplative role, though of course the insight gained may eventually influence action. Iredell Jen-

2. Lionel Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society* (New York, 1953), p. xv.

3. Allen Tate, *Reactionary Essays on Poetry and Ideas* (New York, 1936), p. 112.

kins characterizes ordinary experience as conservative, impatient, and focused on the familiar, a pattern that results in inertia, superficial living, mechanization, and sentimentality. Art cuts through this pattern, making us more sensitive, tolerant, sympathetic, and imaginative by presenting to us new shapes and new insight into old things.<sup>4</sup> A novel or a poem accomplishes all this by making us stop, look at, and listen to itself, to the new structure given to the set of particulars that constitute its aesthetic object. The effect of art's insights on us is dependent on our willingness to wonder, to be really open to the aesthetic object, to stop all busyness and learn a new thing. Jenkins' comment to this point is a nice one.

The accusation has been made over and over again that we see instead of looking, that we hear instead of listening, that we know instead of understanding, that we believe instead of learning, that we react instead of feeling, that we judge instead of sympathizing, that we take exercise instead of enjoying the play of nerve and muscle.<sup>5</sup>

If then the actual role of literature in the human enterprise is to give new insight into the structure of experience as lived by presenting it through the aesthetic object, then the mode of its influence is necessarily an indirect and subtle one. A novel or a poem does not usually offer a program of action or a philosophy of life, but it does present something for our contemplation. The kind of learning gained from the arts is not information or knowledge in the usual meanings of these words, but is far closer to wisdom, understanding, or "lived truth." This is so because, as Brooks points out, the way statements are made in poetry (and I would add, in the novel and drama) is far closer to the way they are made in life than to the way they are made in philosophy or science.

[The poet's] task is finally to unify experience. He must return to us the unity of the experience itself as man knows it in his own experience. The poem, if it be a true poem, is a simulacrum of reality—in this sense, at least, it is an "imitation"—by *being* an

4. Jenkins, *Art and the Human Enterprise*, pp. 242-43.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 158.



experience rather than any mere statement about experience or any mere abstraction from experience.<sup>6</sup>

In life as in literature, a statement is made only in situ, in the total detail of the dramatic conflict that arrives at the resolution: something is true existentially and poetically only when all the paradoxes, tensions, limitations, and conflicts are gone through. The entire way to the conclusion and not merely the conclusion itself is the truth of both existential and poetic statements. So what we have in art is knowledge by acquaintance, the presentation of the way and not merely the solution or conclusion. The mode of the influence of literature is a subtle business, for we are not usually told anything, but only requested to look at something. We are presented with a situation for contemplation, not with a conclusion for action.

If we are still and look hard, what we gain is a subtle education into the intricacies of human reality as lived. What we do with our new wisdom is a nonaesthetic question, though a highly important one. We may, of course, do nothing, for there is no intrinsic connection between knowing and doing as Paul, Kierkegaard, and many others have pointed out.<sup>7</sup> Art has, however, an unconscious or subconscious influence upon our basic attitudes, and it is this influence to which Plato and all who are fearful of the pernicious effects of art refer when they attempt to protect their charges from the power of art through censorship. But whether the influence of art is conscious or not, what we do with it lies outside the purview of aesthetic consideration.

We have come back, full circle, to where we began, for our initial description of aesthetic experience as characterized by wonder has eventuated in an understanding of the function of literature as one that demands wonder or openness to its new insights. If the function of literature is to shake the lines of our usual stereotyped responses, it can fulfill its function only when we are willing to suspend all other concerns and concentrate intensely and openly on the immanent meanings of the aesthetic object.

6. Brooks, *Well Wrought Urn*, pp. 212-13.

7. See Chapter 4, pp. 188-201.



## CHAPTER 3

# The Christian Life

*IF LITERATURE* deepens our understanding of the basic structure of human experience, what relevance does it have to Christianity? Or more specifically, what is the relationship between the novel and the Christian life? The perspective of this essay is concrete and existential: we are not inquiring about a theoretical relationship between aesthetics and Christianity or between art and dogma, but about an existential relationship between works of art, particularly novels, and the Christian life. Put as simply as possible, we are asking about the relationship between a good novel and a Christian.

We have been conditioned in this business of art and religion to think in terms of empty abstractions and high-blown theories rather than in terms of actual, concrete relationships. To reach the central, concrete relationship between literature and Christianity we need to attend to the integral nature and function of literature and to the heart of the Christian faith. Most talk about art and religion has not attended to such matters. In punishment for acquiescing to these omissions, we have listened with approval to Tillich and others telling us that a painting expresses the depths of being and to the dogmatists informing us that original sin is the basis for every pessimistic literary view of man. It ought to be apparent to every person who looks at a painting or reads a novel with a modicum of openness to the realities of the work itself, that most works of art, at any rate, are not about the depths of being or original sin. The intent of the preceding chapter was to consider the nature and function of literature in its own integrity, quite apart from any religious or Christian concern. The view that was developed—the notion that a novel or a play is a self-sufficient whole that

attracts our wonder by its novelty in reflecting and revising the basic structure of human experience—stands or falls on the basis of your and my actual experience with aesthetic objects. This is, I believe, the integral core of the literary arts and particularly of the novel, and hence any relation of the novel to the Christian must refer to this core.

But what is the integral core of Christianity? Is Christianity a reflection of the negative-positive dialectic of being, as expressed in doubt and belief; is it one or more doctrines, whether original sin, the incarnation, or the nature-grace relation? From the perspective of this essay, these are rhetorical questions. Christianity is primarily neither doubt nor doctrine, though doubt is a "before" and doctrine an "after" of the heart of Christianity. The heart of the matter in Christianity is the living relationship between God and man, in which God has called, judged, and redeemed man through his self-giving love in Jesus Christ and asks for man's response of total trust in his Lord and forgiving love to his fellows. There is nothing original, esoteric, or profound about this capsule of the Christian faith, and there had better not be. We are looking for the central relationship between literature and Christianity, and hence if this summary of the Christian faith sounds simple and commonplace, that is exactly as it should be.

But our summary so far sounds more like a creed than an experience, and in keeping with our phenomenological and concrete perspective, we must put our *précis* of the Christian faith in existential terms. The Christian understands himself to be loved by God, loved so deeply that he has been given a new heart and will through this love, a new heart and will which he now seeks to direct to God in gratitude and to his fellowmen in forgiving love. The being loved by God and his response of love to God and to his fellows have traditionally been distinguished as justification and sanctification or the religious and the ethical moments. It is not only a tricky business to separate the movement of God to man and of man to God but also a travesty of Christian experience, which has always witnessed to the interpenetration of the two moments. The response of the Christian or the Christian life is but the deepening, the realization, the actualization of

God's love throughout one's entire life and being. It is not a new thing, but the making concrete of the power and love of God which have taken hold of one's existence.

And yet it is obvious that literature, which is always about man experiencing, cannot have any real relation to God's act but only to man's response. A novel is always about men responding, acting, experiencing; and while this experience can be experience of God or of cosmic powers, it is always primarily about the experience itself. That is to say, a novel cannot project any event, fact, or being apart from the human experience of them. A Christian, on the other hand, believes in a God whose being is entirely independent of himself and whose act in Jesus Christ is a reality quite apart from his belief in it. The novel stays strictly within the confines of the human experience of gods, nature, men, and society; the Christian ventures to assert that his response is in answer to a decision and movement on the part of God and, while only known through human experience, does not have its reality in human experience. While a Christian asserts that, quite apart from the human experience of it, an event has taken place in the person and work of Jesus Christ that has radically changed the face of things, a work of art can never make such an assumption but has to do with this event or any event only in terms of the human experience of it.<sup>1</sup>

Thus the relation between literature and Christian faith is centered on the human experience of God, on the response of man to the activity of God toward man. Most simply, it focuses the relevance of literature to the Christian at the point of the Christian life, the ongoing realization and deepening of God's love through man's response to this love.

1. This is not to deny the phenomenon of Christian art, that is, works of art whose subject matter is the representation of the Christian story. But one can ask whether the representation of the event of Jesus Christ is necessarily Christian art except in the most superficial sense. Is Hoffmann's Sunday-school Jesus Christian art? I hope not. The only meaning of Christian art that makes sense to me is one to which Tillich, Maritain, and Lynch point in different ways. Tillich's category of religious style, Maritain's notion that Christian art springs only from Christian artists, and Lynch's view that art that depicts human reality in its hard, temporal reality is on the "model" of Jesus Christ, who took the finite, limited way—all of these point to the way a subject is handled, not to the subject

If we were to make a distinction (though not a separation) between justification and sanctification, the religious and the ethical moments, we would put the relevance of literature to the Christian on the side of sanctification and the ethical. In placing the primary significance of literature to the Christian at the point of his ongoing life rather than at the point of his conversion, I do not intend to deny the role that works of art may play in preparing the ground for reception of the Gospel. As we have seen, much Christian concern with the arts has been at this point. Tillich's "method of correlation," in which the arts play a preparatory or questioning role, is a dominant motif in contemporary discussions of religion and art. Such a stress seems wrong to me, because it is a perversion of both Christianity and literature through overemphasis. It is false to Christian faith because it elevates the moment of conversion to all-exclusive importance and undercuts the equally significant actualization and deepening of this moment throughout one's entire life. It is false to literature because it restricts Christian interest in novels to the despair motifs, the ostensibly religious (though curiously always negative) motifs, while the range of literary concern with human reality is far broader (and often more hopeful) than is indicated by the categories of despair and alienation. A Christian ought to find relevant to his task any novel that depicts with excellence any aspect of the human situation, and it is my intention to show how this might be so.

Literature is not relevant to the divine decision and activity, nor primarily to that secret moment between God and a man when the man is constrained to put his whole trust in God's love, although novels, of course, can be and

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matter itself (Tillich, "Existential Aspects of Modern Art," pp. 136 ff.; Jacques Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism with Other Essays*, trans. J. F. Scanlan [London, 1939], pp. 70-71; Lynch, "Theology and the Imagination," 29 [1954], 81). Christian art, then, would be no different from what this essay asserts is good art anywhere—works that reflect as they also create the reality of human experience in all its mundane difficulty. As Chapter 4 (pp. 227-30) suggests, this view of the nature of human reality is a Christian insight, but it is also the insight of great art, so that while such works might be called Christian, they are more properly called works of art true to the structure of human experience.

have been written about the experience of conversion. Rather, literature is most significant to the working out of that secret moment, the deepening and enlivening of it, so that the trust in God and love to man that issue from it may be rooted in wide and profound acquaintance with the realities of the world and of men. It is important that we do not ask literature to do more than its integral nature can perform. As that form of learning that acquaints us with the basic structure of human experience, it is not cut out to save men, to deliver philosophies of life, or to issue programs of action. It is, however, tailored to inform us, and to inform us with a directness and depth of feeling not otherwise available, about man as an experiencing, responding creature. It is primarily man as the responder to his environment in both its cosmological and its anthropological aspects that is the domain of literature.<sup>2</sup> Almost every novel

2. By the cosmological I mean neither the mythical nor the metaphysical, but "man in the world" and what existence in the world implies—the facts of birth and death, the malevolency of natural forces, the threats of meaninglessness and extinction, the rampancy of disease, the powers of darkness in the human mind. I mean by the cosmological what H. Richard Niebuhr calls the problem of "the ethos of universal responsibility." He writes, "the human problem is this: how can we interpret all actions upon us, especially the decisive action by which we are, and all things are, by which we are destroyed and all things are destroyed, as divine actions, as actions of affirmation and reaffirmation rather than as actions of animosity or of indifference? How is the ethos of universal responsibility possible even in a modest measure to human beings?" (*The Responsible Self: An Essay in Christian Moral Philosophy* [New York, 1963], p. 175). The cosmological problem is part and parcel of every novel insofar as it deals with man in the world. The detail, the concreteness, the "felt" reality with which a first-rate novelist—a Tolstoy or a Faulkner—investigates this problem through the particular shape of his own story offers valuable acquaintance to the Christian, who has an answer to the problem but whose answer can easily be sentimental unless he feels concretely the bite of the negativities. The Christian answer is the fundamental trust which Jonathan Edwards expressed as consent to being, a response to all that happens as part of the divine plan (Perry Miller, *Jonathan Edwards*, American Men of Letters Series [New York, 1949], p. 192). It is also Niebuhr's description of faith. "Faith is the attitude of the self in its existence toward all the existences that surround it, as beings to be relied upon or to be suspected. It is the attitude that appears in all the wariness and confidence of life as it moves about among the living. It is fundamentally trust or distrust in being itself" (*Responsible Self*, p. 118). This fundamental trust is the driving force behind Paul's conviction that everything is under God's power, power that has been revealed in Jesus Christ to be one with his love (Rom. 8:38–39).



is concerned with the structure of human experience in these two regards—the dealings of characters with cosmic powers (however defined) and with other men. Every novel offers us the “felt” experience of the world with its negative and positive powers and of the needs, joys, desires, and frustrations of men. It is the sort of acquaintance with the world and men that any Christian who is attempting to trust God totally and love other men appropriately must have if his response to God’s love is to be from his heart and not off the top of his head.

This is the main point of my entire essay. Literature with its concrete, varied, and creative depictions of the basic structure of human experience, in both its cosmological and anthropological aspects, offers to the Christian invaluable acquaintance. It gives to the Christian, who is called upon to adhere totally to God in spite of the negative powers that appear to rule the world, an understanding of the depth and breadth of powers that his response must embrace if it is to be realistic. He must take into account those diseased and dying infants who troubled Ivan in *The Brothers Karamazov* (and feel for them as Ivan does) and that white whale which embodied all evil for Ahab in *Moby Dick* (and know in his heart the extent of that whale’s rule as Ahab did). Literature also offers to the Christian, who is called upon to love his fellows with a profound and appropriate love, an entree into the crannies of the human heart that a realistic love cannot do without. What one can learn of the human heart from James or Faulkner or Tolstoy cannot be gained from history, psychology, or sociology books, or even, unfortunately, for most of us, from our own experience with our fellows, which is so stereotyped and patterned that we seldom see beneath the clichés of surface relationships. As was said before, it is the peculiar function of literature both to discover and create the basic structure of human experience. This means creating autonomous visions of life and of the human heart—visions of life that see it as paradoxical, rich, and difficult, and visions of the human heart that see it as full of unexpected cliffs and valleys. It is this integral nature and function of literature that is important to the Christian in the task of realizing his salvation by becoming one who trusts



God in spite of and in the midst of this complexity and who loves his fellows in and through his awareness of the intricate realities of human nature.

What has been summarized in this last paragraph will occupy us for the remainder of the essay. We must look first at the meaning of the Christian life in its own integrity, apart from the relevance of literature to it; then at some attempts on the part of Christians to find ways to implement concretely the demands of the Christian life; and finally at the ways in which literature might serve as one aid to the Christian life.

Before we turn to these substantive questions, however, a further methodological matter must be clarified. When we speak of literature as an aid to the Christian life, we in no way mean that it is the function of literature to aid Christians or anyone else. As should be clear by now, the function of literature is an autonomous one, to offer us acquaintance with the structure of human experience. Literature has no built-in program beyond the contemplation of man experiencing. It is learning that is interesting in itself, and what a reader does with the learning is his own affair and is not dictated by the work. Novels, plays, and poems have no integral relationship to Christian concerns, any more than they have to any other extrinsic concerns; they offer their insights into man experiencing and leave it at that. So what we can discuss as the relation between literature and the Christian man is only the possible, not the actual relation. The point of contact that allows for a possible relation is in literature's concern with man experiencing and the Christian's need for deep acquaintance with man experiencing in his response to God's love. But the actual relation can take place only in the will of each Christian, as he decides to appropriate the learning that literature offers for his own peculiar enterprise. I will have more to say on this relation between "knowing" and "doing"; but in order to avoid the accusation that I am suggesting that the function of literature is the use to which Christians or anyone else put it, I need to say at least this much about the matter now.<sup>3</sup>

3. See Chapter 4, pp. 188-201.

I have insisted all along the line upon underscoring the separation of literature and the Christian life and understanding each in its integrity before discussing the relationship, so that the relationship that does result will emerge from the self-contained reality of each and not be superimposed from the outside. Therefore, I have said that, given the intrinsic nature and function of literature as concerned with man experiencing, its primary relation to the Christian is at the point of the Christian life, man as experiencing and responding to God and his fellows. It now remains for us to investigate, with the same concern for its autonomy, the nature of the Christian life, to see precisely how literature can be relevant to it.

The main source for my treatment of the Christian life will be the New Testament. The choice needs no defense, for although it is by no means the only source—I can and shall refer to Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Wesley, Edwards, Kierkegaard, Barth, Bonhoeffer, and others—it is for all Christians the main source. The way in which I shall approach it will be more confessional-reflective than historical-critical. The distinction here is not between an objective and a subjective reading of the New Testament or between scholarship and faith. No great New Testament scholars, if we include here such names as Weiss, Schweitzer, and Bultmann, read the New Testament from either a purely objective or purely subjective point of view. They are not scholars or men of faith, but scholars in their faith, “devotional scholars.” Such men are both historical-critical and confessional-reflective. There is a difference between what they do and what I shall attempt to do, although the difference is more one of degree than of kind. But there is a difference in kind between my approach and the approach of those who study the New Testament solely as a piece of literature in order to discover either the layers of tradition within it (Form Criticism) or its similarities with other traditions (*Religionsgeschichte*). In sum, as the perspective of this essay is that of a Christian who is attempting to see the relevance of the arts to his life as a Christian, we shall read the New Testament primarily as religious literature and not as material subject to scholarly investigation.

We shall attempt to remain aware of some of the well-known conclusions of recent biblical scholarship, but the main intent is not to add to that enterprise, but to see if possible what the New Testament as a whole and in its particulars has to say about the life of faith, the Christian life. The task is to see the main configuration of the Christian life not in its first-century dress and not in its timeless significance, but as it strikes a Christian reader who (hopefully) has sensitivity to the text and passion for its meanings. This perspective is not necessarily a retreat from the scholarly approach to the New Testament, for the Form Critics—Bultmann, Dibelius, Bornkmann, and others—insist that the very nature of the text is religious, soteriological, and contemporary.<sup>4</sup> The governing interest of all the New Testament writers is religious, not historical, so the text is rightly read by Christians with a certain nonchalance about historical matters (though the nonchalance must always remain spontaneous and never become self-consciously obtrusive) and with a total, spontaneous attention to what the text is saying. For our purposes, we are not reading the New Testament to peel off layers of tradition or to prove anything. We are reading it from the perspective of those already committed to the significance of the events it interprets and now attempting to understand the pattern of Christian life that these events imply.<sup>5</sup>

4. "The Bible does not approach us at all like other books, nor like other 'religious voices of the nations,' as catering for our interest. It claims from the outset to be God's word. We did not come across the Bible in the course of our cultural studies, as we came across, for example, Plato or the Bhagavad-Gita. We came to know it through the Christian church, which put it before us with its authoritative claim. The church's preaching, founded on the Scripture, passes on the word of the Scriptures. It says: God speaks to you *here!* In his majesty he has chosen *this* place. We cannot question whether this place is the right one; we must listen to the call that summons us" (Rudolf Bultmann, "How Does God Speak to Us through the Bible?" *Existence and Faith: Shorter Writings*, ed. and trans. Schubert M. Ogden [New York, 1960], p. 168).

5. Within this general perspective, there is a more particular perspective—a Pauline one. This is not to say that I am reading the Synoptic Gospels and John through the eyes and in the language of Paul, but it is to confess my bias. Or to put it another way, I am attempting to correlate the language of three perspectives, that of the Synoptics, John, and Paul from a point of view largely influenced by the Pauline literature. The attempt is for the most part my own, and for that reason there are relatively few footnotes to New Testament scholars.

We shall deal with the Christian life under four headings: the events that precede and give rise to it; the quality of the Christian life itself; a dilemma about its actualization, as witnessed in Christian experience; and some guides to its concrete realization. In New Testament terms, we shall first consider the reign of God, announced as present in Jesus Christ; then see how life under his reign involves total adherence to God and love of one's fellows, summed up in the notion of "discipleship"; then ask about the Christian's problem of making his trust in God and love of fellows an appropriate, informed, and realistic response; and finally turn to the guides offered in the New Testament for the implementation of discipleship. We will then be in a position to see how literature, with its insight into the structure of human experience, can inform that response so that it becomes more realistic and appropriate.

### *THE REIGN OF GOD*

The event that forms the basis of the Christian life is the proclamation of the present reality of God's reign. The proper form to life as given in the New Testament is simply the appropriate response to the fact that God does rule now. The form and content of the Christian life is a spelling out of the implications of that fact. It is impossible, then, to discuss the nature of the Christian life apart from the event that precedes and determines it, even though the event itself is not our primary focus. But it is the presupposition of the Christian life, and for that reason we must attend at least to its broad outlines. What we shall offer here is only the barest summary of the heart of the proclamation to which the Christian life is the response.

The heart of the proclamation is the immediacy and totality of God's presence and power. In the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus proclaims this immediacy and totality in terms of the kingdom of God; the author of the Gospel of John understands it in terms of new life; Paul presents it as the righteousness of God. In each instance, the main point is that a new basis for man's existence has become a fact and men are called upon to decide for or against it. The main features of

God's rule are its totality and its graciousness: it is dominion over the demonic forces of the world as well as over men's hearts, and it is offered as a free gift. The totality of God's reign is indicated in the Synoptic Gospels by the power of Jesus and the apostles to cast out demons; it is expressed in the light-dark imagery of John; it is eulogized on a cosmic scale in the christological hymns of Colossians and Ephesians and in the magnificent affirmations of faith in Romans 3-8 as the invulnerability of God's rule against all foes. But the totality of God's rule as proclaimed in the New Testament does not primarily mean the rule of God over the world considered as such, but over the nexus of powers to which men are enslaved. It is the rule over men's hearts, minds, and wills that is the nub of the matter.

In the Synoptic Gospels we see this rule over men's hearts, minds, and wills in Jesus' preaching about the kingdom, in parables pointing to the relation between God and man, and in the forgiving and healing acts of Jesus. The presence of God's reign is presented as a challenge and a demand, as Mark's Gospel indicates in the opening summary of Jesus' preaching: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15). But the demand is preceded by an invitation, by God's gracious call which summons the unloved, the rejected, the lowly, and the sinful to his table in preference to the rich and powerful (Luke 14:1-24; Matt. 22:1-10); which holds up the simplicity of a child's acceptance of a gift as the model for entrance into the kingdom (Matt. 18:1-4; Mark 10:13-15; Luke 18:15-17); and which rewards the last the same as the first, quite apart from human conceptions of merit (Matt. 20:1-16). God's rule is established through this graciousness, through the removal of the barrier that prohibits a man's total trust in God, the barrier of his own past and present withholding of that trust. This mode of God's action is not presented primarily in either the kingdom parables or in the formal addresses, such as Matthew's collections of sayings and parables (Matt. 5-7; 10; 13; 18; 23-25), but in the nativity hymns; in the quotation from Isaiah with which Jesus opens his ministry (Luke 4:18-19); in the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son; and in the Beatitudes. It



is also and perhaps most clearly presented in the activity of Jesus, in his ministry of healing and forgiving, which, as the Gospel writers point out, was more often than not prompted by the emotions of pity and compassion for suffering men. Finally, the way God establishes his kingdom, the mode of suffering and forgiving love, is completed in the death of Jesus and his appearance to the disciples.

The problem of the kingdom in the Synoptic Gospels is certainly a complex one, and a full treatment of it would have to deal with all the more or less cryptic parables and metaphors used to suggest its nature, for it is never fully described or defined. But if we believe that Jesus is the one in whom God is present and that in his words and life we can see the face of God himself, then it seems possible to say that the kingdom of God is his rule over the deepest orientation of men's spirits, offered from compassion and accomplished through the suffering love of a father for his children.<sup>1</sup> It is a total and a gracious rule, defeating the forces of evil and negation that tempt and enslave men and reaching to the sick bodies of men as well as to their guilty and hardened hearts.

Throughout the rest of the New Testament, the terms change and the mode, though not the nature, of God's activity is sharpened, but the central proclamation of the present and gracious rule of God does not alter. We no longer hear so much about the kingdom of God, and the passion narratives, which in the Synoptic Gospels were preceded by an account of the words and acts of Jesus, emerge as the central focus. What was suggested in every line of the Synoptic Gospels—that God's rule is coming about in the person and work of Jesus and especially in his death and resurrection—is in the Fourth Gospel, Paul, and the rest of the New Testament proclaimed as the fundamental content and confession of faith.

In the Gospel of John, we find "life," "light," "truth," and "love" as the terms used to suggest the reign of God; the way

1. This is one example of my Pauline perspective mentioned in n. 5 of the introduction, a perspective, though by no means the only possible one, which speaks of the meaning of the story of Jesus Christ rather than of that story itself.



to this new life is Jesus himself. The life offered in Jesus is such a total rule that it requires a radical break with old ways and a new birth, a birth of the spirit (John 3:1-6). It brings with it power to walk in the "light," as distinguished from the dark path of evil deeds (John 3:19-21; 8:12), and by walking in the light one sees the "truth," the way things really are (John 8:43-47; 9:39-41). But most of all the reign of God is the reign of "love," initiated by the free love of God and resulting in a network of coexistence in love. We read in John's Gospel of Jesus' prayer to the Father:

The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them even as thou hast loved me (John 17:22-23).

The special quality of John's Gospel is this web of love cast over the suffering world, catching it up, both for God's own glory and for the reconciliation of the world to him in intimate fellowship. The passages on this network of love (John 13:34-35; 14:20-21; 15:4-14; 17:20-26) witness to its totality and graciousness. The spearhead of the network is God's own love (John 3:16), which has been poured out in the suffering and death of Jesus for all men, which claims them totally, and which returns to God as complete dependence on him and love of one's fellows.

The total and gracious rule of God epitomized in John's Gospel as God's love is given in Paul's letters as the righteousness of God (Rom. 3:20-26). The righteousness of God for Paul is neither an abstract idea nor a notion entirely determined by its Old Testament background, although it is the continuation and accomplishment of God's graciousness, his utter faithfulness to his Covenant. The righteousness of God is his suffering and forgiving love consummated in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, freeing men from the old way to right relations with God by way of the law and instituting a new way.<sup>2</sup> This new way completely undercuts all other ways that men might devise, as Paul takes pains to

2. Günther Bornkamm, "Christology and Justification in Pauline Theology," Unpublished Shaffer Lectures (New Haven, Yale Divinity School, 1963).

point out. All have sinned, so all can be justified—brought back into fellowship with God—only by his free gift, the expiation of Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:21–26; 5:1–11; 8:31–39). Both the totality and the graciousness of God's rule are indicated by the imagery Paul uses to describe the new basis of existence: we who were once enemies are no longer so (Rom. 5:10–11); we who were slaves to sin have become free men in our slavery to God and we have become his sons (Rom. 6:20–23; Gal. 4:1–7); we have become children of God and fellow-heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:16); we have become conquerors of all in life and death that might separate us from God's love in Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:37–39; I Cor. 3:21–23). For Paul, the gracious, righteous rule of God is primarily his complete power over the hearts and wills of men, so that a man has an entirely new orientation to both God and his fellows, an orientation of trust or faith in God and ministering love to other men.

This new orientation is life in Christ, an expression adequate to the new foundation of a man's existence and to the form which his existence must now take—the form that Christ's life also took. But what Paul experienced as the loving and complete rule of God over his own heart and will expands into an inclusion of all creation under this rule (Rom. 8:18–25). The doxological hymns of Ephesians and Colossians, whether Pauline or not, are a natural impulse of men who have experienced the loving rule of God in their lives—the impulse to insist that this gracious reign is unlimited in scope and in depth, in time and in space.

In other books of the New Testament, we often sense a loss of freshness and spontaneity in the expression of the total and gracious rule of God which has come about in Jesus Christ. What is a story of God's love in the Synoptics, a speculation about its scope and depth in John, and an experience of it in Paul, becomes a doctrine in the Pastoral Epistles, an impetus to morality in the Catholic Epistles, and an esoteric mystery in Hebrews and Revelation. But its substance does not change. The First Book of Timothy expresses the heart of the matter in its own wooden way: "The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1:15a); The First Book of Peter ob-

scures the grace of God behind moralism but still relies on it as the basis of morality (1:13-21); so also Hebrews, with its emphasis on Jesus Christ as the high priest who has entered into the sanctuary of God on our behalf, expresses the everlasting fellowship that is now ours (7:26-28; 10:1-25); and even the mysteries of the Revelation of John point to the power of God's grace as it stimulates a poetic imagination.

The primary experience of the event that forms the heart of the Christian faith—the establishment of God's loving, all-powerful reign—is the experience of freedom from whatever powers are a man's peculiar demons, whether these powers be disease, guilt, the threat of meaninglessness, the fear of death, or any of the infinite variations on these themes. It is also the experience of thanksgiving for liberation from these powers and deliverance into the hands of a loving God. What we have said is commonplace; it is, I would hold, what Christians everywhere have always believed. But this is as it should be, for if we are looking for the heart of the Christian message, nothing but the ordinary Gospel will serve our purpose. It will not do to be original or esoteric, as is Tillich with his rendition of Christianity in terms of a negative-positive dialectic of being; nor to be partial, as are those who center on the doctrine of original sin or even the doctrine of the incarnation as the key to Christianity. Nor will it do to render the Christian message in metaphysical or doctrinal terminology, for if we are seeking the relationship between the novel and the Christian, we are not looking for a systematic or an external relationship between Christian ideas or doctrines and literary concepts, but for an existential relationship between the novel as man experiencing his world and his fellows and the Christian as one who, acknowledging God's liberating love, feels constrained to praise his God and love his fellows.

And it is precisely here, at the point where a man "feels constrained to praise his God and love his fellows," that the concrete, existential relationship of the novel to the Christian appears, for the wisdom about man and the world that is the offering of novels feeds into the Christian's need for empathetic knowledge of the world and of men so that his praise may be profound and his love appropriate. It is the Christian

life, then, or what we shall call discipleship, that is the point of contact between the novel and the Christian. The rule of God, actualized in Jesus Christ, is, of course, the crucial thing in the New Testament, but this event is not our main concern. Its primary outlines, however, are central to us, for the Christian life, which is but the response to the present reality of God's reign, is molded both by the nature of the reign of God—its totality and its graciousness—and by its form—the person and work of Jesus Christ. The centrality of the Christian life for our concerns demands that we study its details in the New Testament and look at a dilemma in the actual life of a Christian, for only after we understand what the Christian life is and how it operates will we see how literature can be relevant to it.

### DISCIPLESHIP

According to the New Testament, the proper form of life is determined by the fact that God reigns now. The Christian life, or life on the basis of the event that actualizes the gracious rule of God, is not a new and different thing, but receives its distinctive contours from this event. It is life to and from Jesus Christ who brings the rule of God. Its distinctive note is acknowledgment of the establishment of God's reign through his action in Jesus Christ. It is repentance in the Synoptic Gospels, the turning of oneself entirely to God; in John's Gospel, it is belief in Jesus as the way to God; in Paul's letters, it is the theme "we are his," cutting away all other loyalties and securities (I Cor. 3: 21-23; Rom. 14:7-9). The simplest as well as the most inclusive summary of the Christian life is this "we are his." If God truly reigns now, if his rule is a total as well as a gracious one, then the main response of men—thinking along Paul's lines—can only be the acceptance of the completeness of his rule over their lives and thanksgiving for its graciousness.

It is, then, somewhat artificial to hypostatize the Christian life into justification and sanctification or religion and ethics, as is so often done. It is more accurate to speak of a situation, the situation of man open to the gracious, total rule of God and of the implications of being open. The decisive implica-

tion from which all else is derived is a man's willing himself over to God. As God's reign is primarily aimed at men's hearts, it is precisely the basic orientation of a man that is the nub of life under God's reign. The refrain "we are his" runs throughout Christian letters. It is Augustine's *adherere*, the passionate cleaving to God which distinguishes life according to the spirit from life according to the flesh.<sup>1</sup> It is Calvin's ethic of the cross, the way of suffering willingly accepted because God has chosen us as his own.<sup>2</sup> It is Luther's joyful cry of the redeemed man who, by becoming Christ's has exchanged his shackles for the gift of freedom.<sup>3</sup> It is Wesley's understanding of perfection, the total orientation of a man to God. Writing of perfection, Wesley says:

In one view, it is purity of intention, dedicating all the life to God. It is giving God all our heart; it is one desire and design ruling all our tempers. It is the devoting, not a part, but all, our soul, body, and substance to God. In another view, it is all the mind which was in Christ, enabling us to walk as Christ walked. It is the circumcision of the heart from all filthiness, all inward as well as outward pollution. It is a renewal of the heart in the whole image of God, the full likeness of Him that created it. In yet another, it is the loving God with all our heart, and our neighbor as ourselves.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, the "we are his" is the message of Jesus himself, for the dual motifs of his preaching, the kingdom of God and the will of God, are really one proclamation. It is the proclamation that God reigns now and that it is his will that men accept his rule. The "repent and obey" of the Synoptic Gospels as not an ethical injunction to achieve an ideal, not a demand to fulfill a new law, but the demand for complete openness to God's power and love—and let the chips fall where they will. The concrete demands of the Christian life

1. Augustine, "The City of God," *Basic Writings*, ed. Oates, pp. 242-43.

2. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. John Allen (7th American ed. Philadelphia, 1936), I, 751-76.

3. Martin Luther, "A Treatise on Christian Liberty," *Three Treatises*, trans. C. M. Jacobs, A. T. W. Steinhäuser, and W. A. Lambert (Philadelphia, 1947), pp. 260-61.

4. John Wesley, "A Plain Account of Christian Perfection," sec. 27, as quoted in Waldo Beach and H. Richard Niebuhr, eds., *Christian Ethics: Sources of the Living Tradition* (New York, 1955), p. 359.



are by no means set aside, but they are placed under the one demand of trust in God.

The content of the Christian life, the configuration of the "we are his," is set forth in the New Testament under the rubric of discipleship. Discipleship is the making of one's faith in God total, which means first of all absolute adherence to Jesus Christ as the one who brings God's reign. Absolute adherence to him requires participation in his way, involving suffering and an imitation of the quality of his life. It is Paul's exhortation to put on the mind of Christ for the purpose of serving and glorifying God (Phil. 2:1-11; Rom. 14:6b-15:13). The mind of Christ is the quality or content of the Christian life, summed up in the Great Commandment as complete trust in God and forgiving love to other men. It has, therefore, what we might call a cosmological and an anthropological thrust—it is love directed both toward God, in spite of the negativities, ambiguities, and powers of evil in the world, and toward our fellows, in spite of their unlovableness and in relation to their real and concrete needs.

A short parenthesis on "imitation" is perhaps necessary here, for in our day the mere mention of the word can call forth scornful insinuations of naïveté. We shall not try to defend the term's sophistication, only its biblical authority. However, as will become clear in our discussion, we do not mean by imitation "doing what Jesus did." As Eduard Schweizer points out in his excellent study of New Testament discipleship, discipleship never meant following Jesus as an example to be imitated in some timeless fashion. It did, however, involve a being "with him" in a way analogous to the way the first disciples were with him on the roads of Palestine; being "with him" is made possible by his prior being "for us," the unique work of forgiving love consummated on the cross by which he chose us to be "with him."<sup>5</sup>

In order to move in on the configuration of discipleship in the New Testament, we must look more closely at the text, keeping in mind its central meaning, "we are his," and the implications of this total adherence—trust in God and love to fellows. Schweizer sets the right note for a discussion of

5. Schweizer, *Lordship and Discipleship*, pp. 99-100.



discipleship in the Synoptic Gospels. He says that "following" was used in two senses in Judaism—the following or imitation of the virtues of God and the concrete or literal following of a servant who belongs to his lord, as in following Baal and forsaking Jahweh. The Synoptic writers understand following Jesus in the latter usage.<sup>6</sup> The relationship here then is always adherence to a person, not imitation of an example. The marks of discipleship that Schweizer notes in the Synoptics reflect this basic dependence of disciples on their master. Discipleship involves absolute allegiance to Jesus, setting aside all other loyalties, comforts, and securities. It is a radically new orientation, demanding choice but preceded by a call; it means a participation in his way of suffering, and it results in being together with Jesus in service to him.<sup>7</sup> This radical adherence to Jesus is certainly the keynote of the Synoptic understanding of discipleship. It is implied in Mark's characteristic adverb "immediately" to describe the manner in which Simon and Andrew respond to the call of Jesus (Mark 1: 16–20). The content of discipleship is clearly set forth in the demand of self-denial and cross-bearing (Mark 8:34–38; Matt. 10:38–39), in the demand to renounce friends and family (Matt. 10:34–38, 8:18–22; Luke 14:25–33), and in the story of the rich young man who would not give up all to follow Jesus (Mark 10:17–22). It is illustrated in the gift of the widow who gave all she had (Mark 12:41–44) and, perhaps most poignantly, in the reckless anointing of Jesus by the woman of Bethany (Mark 14:3–9).

But one of the most distinctive notes of the Synoptic understanding of discipleship, the "we are his," is its insistence that adherence to Jesus is adherence to the one "who alone is good" (Mark 10:18, 3:31–35; Matt. 19:17, 12:46–50; Luke 18:19, 8:19–21, 11:27–28). Jesus always points beyond himself to God. Thus, discipleship is not a "Jesuolatry," but a complete faith in the God whose authority Jesus exercises and a ministering love to others on the pattern of God himself in his mode of a servant. Jesus is the object of faith and the form of loving service to others, but only because he is the one who is bringing God's reign and revealing his atti-

6. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

tude toward men. Hence, what we have called the cosmological and anthropological dimensions of discipleship—the total and pervasive trust in God and love to fellows—receive their concrete contours from the words, acts, and stories of Jesus because, as the Synoptic writers imply and all Christians believe, he is the one in whom God is present in the world for the salvation of all men.

In the Synoptic Gospels the primary response of the followers of Jesus is their utter dependence on God, their willingness to seek first the kingdom, their trust in Jesus as God's ambassador. The range of passages dealing with this point is enormous—the scope extends from Mark's miracle tale of the stilling of the tempest (Mark 4:35-41) and Matthew's account of Peter walking on the water (Matt. 14:28-33), to the many descriptions of healings dependent on faith (Mark 5:25-34, 9:14-29, 10:46-52; Matt. 8:5-13) and the story of the harlot whose gratitude for the forgiveness of her sins knew no bounds (Luke 7:36-50). Jesus tells those who would follow him that their trust in God must be so complete that it can move mountains (Mark 11:22-25), so relaxed that it is without anxiety (Matt. 6:25-34), so free that it can ask all things and be assured of receiving them (Matt. 7:7-12; Luke 11:5-13). It is a trust that no one can work himself into, as Jesus makes clear in the story of the rich young man who could not relinquish his earthly security and rely utterly on God. But what is impossible for men is possible with God (Mark 10:27); the one thing needed, the utter dependence which is more like a child's innate trust than like an adult's calculated risk, is itself a gift. The quality of trust demanded is indicated in the uncompromising purity of response of those praised in the Beatitudes and in Mary's astonishment and acceptance of what is to happen to her, summed up in the angel's words, "For with God nothing will be impossible" (Luke 1:37).

A second motif of discipleship in the Synoptic Gospels is the attitude toward other men that characterizes followers of Jesus. Its prime note is service to the needs of others. It is a reversal of the worldly standards of success and value, for the last, the lowliest, the humble, those who wait on others, are considered first in the kingdom (Mark 9:33-37,

10:35-45; Matt. 23:9-12; Luke 14:7-14). It is the attitude that the Synoptic writers see epitomized in Jesus' own willingness to serve others in his healing and forgiving ministry, reaching its peak of intensity in the offering of his life and its ritualistic summation in the breaking of bread at the Last Supper. The parable of the good Samaritan is justly famous as an illustration of loving service to others, for Luke's story has the directness, the simplicity of motivation, and the concern with total and concrete care of the injured man that are characteristic of all Jesus' words about love of others and his own deeds. The demand to love others in this fashion is not given as a law, a principle, or an ideal; it is told in stories and illustrated by his own life which was so lived. The demand to love others, like the demand to trust God, is inexorable, total, impossible.

The impossibility is countered in the Synoptic Gospels not only by the words of Jesus that "it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32), but by every parable pointing to the relationship between God and man as one of father to son, giver to receiver, protector to protected, and by the belief of the Gospel writers that "we are his" not by our own efforts but by the vicarious death of Jesus himself. In the other books of the New Testament, Jesus' being "for us" emerges even more centrally as the way in which we can be "with him." The content of the early preaching, such as Peter's speech in Acts 2:14-36, is focused on the death and resurrection. The response to these events is the same as the response demanded by Jesus to his preaching of the kingdom. It is to repent, to acknowledge the rule of God. Throughout the rest of the New Testament, the trust in God and love of fellows that comprise the heart of discipleship or the Christian life is centered on Jesus Christ. He is the manifestation of the total, gracious rule of God over men's hearts and wills and hence the one to whom men turn in complete trust. He is also the manifestation of God's love of men and hence the source of power and illumination for our love of others.

In the Fourth Gospel, the impossible trust in God, which in the Synoptics Jesus had demanded of his disciples, is now focused on his own person not as a surrogate for God, but as the direct agent of God's work. John's concern with Jesus'

"credentials" is not a secondary matter, but an attempt to underscore the life and death of Jesus as the means God has chosen for accomplishing his rule. This rule is not given as the kingdom of God, but in a more personal and Hellenistic-Oriental vocabulary. John expresses it in terms of eternal life as a present possession (11:25-26), the ability to walk in the light (8:12), new birth in the spirit (3:1-8), freedom from sin (8:34-38), and knowledge of the truth (8:31-33; 14:6; 1:7). The terms differ but the heart of the matter remains the same: life under God involves acknowledging a new basis of existence, which John struggles to express by a vocabulary of contrasting images and of absolutes such as "new birth" and "truth." As Jesus is the source of this new existence, belief in him becomes the primary response demanded of men (John 3:15-21; 5:21-24; 6:28-29; 11:24-25; 14:1-4). This is what we have previously called the cosmological response—trust that in Jesus Christ God is establishing his rule against all darkness, sin, and death, against all the negative powers of existence. And as Jesus is the disclosure of the quality of the new existence, the quality that John sums up as love, love of others, becomes the second response demanded of men (13:34-35; 14:12-14; 17:20-26). This is what we have previously called the anthropological response, love toward other men because, and as, Jesus loved us. The cosmological and anthropological responses mesh in John's Gospel, for since God loved the world in Jesus Christ, he overcomes its darkness even as he redeems men, thus freeing them from its powers and binding all men into the fabric of his love (3:16-21; 17:20-23). The graciousness with which God establishes his rule, the love that causes Jesus to lay down his life for his friends (John 15:13), issues in an understanding of the Christian life as one of union in love of all men through Christ with the Father.

The letters of Paul have justifiably been treasured by the Church as the primary source for an understanding of the Christian life. They are an account of a man who strives relentlessly and deeply to understand the ramifications of "we are his." What Paul expresses is an imaginative reconstruction of the motifs of adherence to God through Christ and ministering love to others that we have previously noted as

the traits of discipleship. For Paul, as for the other New Testament writers, discipleship or being "with him" or following after him is a consequence of his being "for us." There is, here as elsewhere, no suggestion that imitation can mean anything but participation in his unique work, no suggestion that it is anything but inclusion in his death and resurrection, as chapter 6 of Romans makes very clear. But chapter 6 of Romans, with its shifts from past to present to future tenses, its subjunctives and imperatives, also insists that the old self which was crucified with Christ must be willed over to him again and again (cf. Phil. 3:13 ff.; I Cor. 13:8 ff.). The work that Jesus Christ did "for us" will only be fully actualized when we are entirely "with him," when our lives take on the configuration of his, which participation in his death and resurrection brings about. Paul makes the key point when he writes: "The death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 6:10-11). The being "with him" which he made possible through his "for us" is this being alive to God, living our lives toward God (Rom. 14:5-15:13), acknowledging that "we are his."

Discipleship, or being "with him," involves for Paul as for John both a cosmological and an anthropological response. For Paul, the cosmological response of the Christian is such a total and pervasive matter that he can express the depths of this belonging only in radical images, images that are physical and at times almost visceral. We are "in Christ." We no longer live, but Christ lives in us (Gal. 2:19-21); our bodies are not our own and cannot be given to another in prostitution for they belong to God (I Cor. 6:19-21). Through the bread and wine we participate in the body of Christ (I Cor. 10:14-22); we are slaves of righteousness under the total rule of God (Rom. 6:12-23), and we belong to Christ whether we live or die (Rom. 14:7-9). The centrality of Jesus Christ as the object of man's trust is no more "Jesuolatry" here than elsewhere in the New Testament. Rather, because God "in Christ was reconciling the world to himself" (II Cor. 5:19a), because God chose this way of accomplishing his reign over men's hearts and wills, all who live now live "no longer for



themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised" (II Cor. 5:15b). This adherence to Jesus Christ is what Paul calls faith, the trust that against all odds, whether of disease, weakness, temptation, sin, or death, we will not be separated from fellowship with God (Rom. 8:31-39). It is the trust based not on wishful thinking but on the gracious reality of Jesus Christ that, in spite of appearances, all things do work together for good to those who love God (Rom. 8:28).

Although the imagery that Paul uses to express the depths in which a man belongs to God through Christ is physical or, we might say, ontological or mystical, he is, as his understanding of faith makes clear, talking about the basic orientation of a man's heart and not about a physical, ontological, or mystical participation in a god, as in the case of the mystery cults (Rom. 1:17, 3:21-26, 4:1-6; Gal. 2:15-21). A man can only be in Christ to the extent that he opens himself to the love of God in Christ Jesus. The "we are his" is first of all the fact that he has made us his own, but it is also the deepening realization of what it means to belong completely to God, the day-to-day willing over to God of this joy, this need, this failure, this task, this fear (Rom. 12:15; I Cor. 8:4-6; II Cor. 5:14-15; Phil. 3:12-14). Life in the Spirit, then, is oddly enough a very mundane affair, taking "every thought captive to obey Christ" (II Cor. 10:5b).

Belonging to God, being such a mundane affair, involves not only total trust in God but also love of one's fellows—the anthropological side of the response. God's love in Christ to all men means that men should love one another as they have been loved. As the impetus for the Christian life is always a response to the activity of God, it is as true of man's love of other men as it is of his trust in God that the intensity and kind of response is an imitation of the love with which God has loved man. Again and again throughout Paul's letters, we find not only the imperative following the indicative, but the nature of the imperative being determined by the nature of the indicative. "Have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5) becomes for Paul as well as for most of the New Testament writers the possibility as well as the actualization of the love of fellows. Christ's love



is not only the motive for loving others, but it is also the form that that love should take. It is a love that is epitomized in the humility, obedience, and forgiveness of Jesus in Philip-pians 2, catalogued in the lists of virtues (Gal. 5:22-24), eulogized in I Corinthians 13, and illustrated in Paul's boast about his own life of ministering and suffering love in the service of the Gospel.

The relation between Christ's work for us and Christian behavior in response to that work is obscured in those books of the New Testament, notably the Catholic Epistles, that understand the imitation of Christ in terms of rules given by him. But even in those books where works and virtues seem to emerge with a quasi-independence, they are still more often than not based on God's good work toward us (Titus 2:11-14, 3:1-8; I Pet. 1:13-2:10; I John 1:5-7, 3:1-3, 9-10). Works are still the inescapable consequence of salvation and not the condition for it.

We have been tracing throughout the main books of the New Testament major variations on the basic theme of discipleship or the Christian life—the "we are his." We have seen that the principal motif of the Christian life is a total acceptance of God's gracious reign accomplished in Jesus Christ, an acceptance issuing in trust in God and love of one's fellows. In one way or another, Jesus is the object of trust as well as the pattern or form that human trust in God and love of others should take. He is the "realized man" as well as the Savior. So Christians are called upon to imitate him not in the sense of doing what he did, but in the sense of taking on the quality of his life, putting on the mind of Christ. But even this imitation is possible only because Christ is "for us" in such a way that we can be "with him," only because he has reconciled us to God, so that through participation in his work for us we take on, we imitate, the qualities of the one who is the source of our new life. Discipleship does involve becoming like Jesus, for he is man as man ought to be, as well as God for us. But it does not involve becoming another Jesus, the opposite danger to "Jesuolatry." The imitation, as John and Paul insist, depends on participation in his prior work for us, and it is a participation of heart and will. As the whole man becomes oriented toward God's

love in Jesus Christ, as a man is drawn by God to find his existence in Christ, he also takes on the form of the mind of Christ. He takes it on not as a new law, as James unfortunately suggests, but as the pattern that, given the new orientation, is inescapable, though by no means easy. And the mind of Christ, both as adherence to God and love of one's fellows, must be a mundane, lively, realistic, tough-minded, and daily affair.

However, Christians have always been troubled by the task of making their trust in God and love of others the realistic and concrete business that it ought to be. The command to trust God totally and love men sensitively, when brought to the level of everyday living, to the level of *this* threat to God's gracious rule and *this* neighbor's need, poses problems that the command as such does not speak to. It poses the problem of becoming informed about a world that menaces belief in the loving rule of God and that must be known and felt if our trusting response to God is to be anything but naïve wishful thinking. It also requires understanding of the labyrinthine hearts of men. Unless we feel these convolutions of men's spirits, we cannot possibly love them genuinely and concretely. The sort of information needed about the world and other men is not cold and factual, but wisdom, mature perception informed by empathy. It is both passionate and objective, sympathetic and realistic, broad and concrete.

Acquiring this wisdom is not, of course, the rock bottom of discipleship. Discipleship is primarily willingness and determination to be open to God, willingness and determination to trust him and love others. Discipleship is primarily an attitude toward life, not the sum total of a life lived. On the other hand, responsible discipleship is also informed, active, busy trust and love. Given the willingness and determination (which are matters of decision and not simply of increased knowledge), there is still the problem of informing the decision. It is to this task of deepening, of making more realistic, sensitive, and appropriate our response to God and man, that literature's wisdom about man and the world speaks. It speaks to a dilemma of the disciple of Christ, the dilemma of trusting God in this particular, concrete, contemporary world of ours and of loving this

enigmatic neighbor of ours. Christians by and large have usually not seen imaginative literature as an important aid in mitigating their dilemma. Unfortunately, they have more often than not ended their quest for concrete realization of their discipleship either in spontaneous outbursts of love that are unrelated to the actualities of their situation, or in the formulation of principles for the conduct of secular affairs that may be relevant to the contemporary facts but are unrelated to Christian love. As illustrations of these types we need only think of the extreme forms of Lutheran spontaneity or of Roman Catholic natural law ethics. Literature is by no means about to stage a revolution on behalf of the Christian life. But it is my contention that, given its own nature and function, it can be one aid to the concrete realization of discipleship.

The relevance of literature to the Christian life will appear substantial and convincing only after we have looked more carefully at this special dilemma of discipleship in Christian experience. And the appropriateness of literature's mode of informing our discipleship can be appreciated only when we have investigated the mode of instruction about the Christian life in the New Testament itself. We shall discover that the major instructional forms of the New Testament—the confession, the parable, and the story of Jesus—point to literature as an appropriate form for aiding the implementation of Christian discipleship. It is to these two matters—a dilemma and the New Testament suggestions for alleviating that dilemma—that we now turn.

### *A DILEMMA OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE*

Christian discipleship, as our study of the New Testament has shown, consists primarily in being open to God's love. It is a change of heart and will, of basic orientation away from self and toward total dependence on God, issuing in love toward others. It is not so much a doing as it is a being. It is being the recipient of God's gracious love in Jesus Christ, and it is being the one who gratefully acknowledges that love. The Christian life, therefore, is not primarily a task to be accomplished or an ideal to be achieved, but a

fact to be lived out—the fact of God's establishment of his rule in Jesus Christ. This living out is not a reality independent of God's loving act but is the deepening of the implications of his act. So the Christian life is primarily a religious rather than an ethical matter, or perhaps it is more accurate to say that Christian ethics is dependent upon faith.<sup>1</sup> But the precedence of being over doing has led to some abuses. Beach and Niebuhr in their *Christian Ethics* point up the issue in a comment on Luther.

In distinction from the intellectualist view, which regards the human mind as fundamentally theoretical and for which the will translates the prior purposes of the intellect into action, Luther, with the voluntarists in general, notes that "the being and nature of man cannot for an instant be without doing or not-doing something, enduring or running away from something, for life never rests." Man's moral problem, from this point of view, is less that of choosing the right means for the sake of attaining a chosen end than it is that of doing rightly the actions that issue from his nature. For voluntarism action, though always accompanied by understanding, does not begin with reflection. It is an expression of man's inner nature, of the set and disposition of his will. . . . The moral question is not about the *what* but about the *how* of our activity.<sup>2</sup>

The Christian life does consist in a transformation of the will, but the emphasis on the how rather than on the what of our activity as Christians has resulted in a cult of "love and do what you will," which in turn has contributed to the dismissal of Christian action as irrelevant, naïve, and unrealistic. The traditional epithet is "otherworldly." None of us needs to be reminded that nonchalance about the world and its realities is built right into the Bible. The command of

1. The meaning of being and doing or religion and ethics and the relation between them is nowhere better expressed than in Niebuhr's *Responsible Self*. By the being of Christians, Niebuhr points to their attitude of fundamental trust in being itself—the "strange miracle" that Jesus Christ accomplishes in men whereby "he makes them suspicious of their deep suspicion of the Determiner of Destiny" (p. 175). The doing of Christians takes place within this context and is defined by it: it is for Niebuhr the fitting response of men to the action of God upon them whereby he has made such trust possible. It is therefore an affirmative, appreciative, and creative response to God and to all other beings that qualify and complete our lives. It is also a response that is responsible, one made in the light of genuine understanding of the context in which we are called upon to respond (p. 18).

2. Beach and Niebuhr, eds., *Christian Ethics*, p. 240.

Jesus to seek only the kingdom of God, to forget food and clothing, to serve God and not mammon—in a word, to concentrate attention on the coming completion of God's rule rather than on the present realities of worldly existence—has been the basis of both Christian freedom from the world and Christian bondage to ignorance about it.

The history of Christian attempts to implement discipleship has been dogged by a refusal to take the world seriously, a refusal to learn about the concrete and contemporary realities of the world. It is difficult to understand how a man can trust God deeply and realistically, in face of the threats posed to this trust by actual existence, unless he knows his world well; it is difficult to understand how he can love his fellows sensitively and appropriately unless he learns of the needs, joys, despairs, and potentialities of his fellows. And yet Christian ethics has not usually been concerned with acquiring concrete, penetrating, contemporary knowledge of the situation in which the Christian is called upon to make his response. The sort of knowledge that is needed as one component of an adequate response does not consist of facts or principles (though these are essential too); it is "felt" knowledge, wisdom, or mature insight. It is knowledge that is at once empathetic and realistic. The Christian needs not mere facts about man and the world and not mere feeling for them, but an *informed love*.<sup>3</sup>

What we mean by a love that is informed can perhaps best be suggested by a glance at Jonathan Edwards' treatment of the religious affections. For Edwards, the prime affection is disinterested and total love of God, the inclination of the whole self toward God. This inclination is not, he insists,

3. "Inform" is being used here in accordance with the prevailing modern usage, as forming the mind or character by the imparting of knowledge. But it is also intended to retain overtones of its original meaning in Aristotelian philosophy, as giving form to something or acting as its formative principle. Thus "information" is not a mere collection of data; it has significance as information only because it can "inform" the mind and character of man and thereby shape human thought and action. By a love that is informed we understand a love that is shaped because it is knowledgeable, acquainted with the realities of the world by way of instruction and observation. An informed love, then, is a love shaped by a lively awareness of the actualities of life with God and with one's fellowmen.



merely a matter of knowing that God is sovereign, but it is an inclination that springs from the center of a man, from his affections. Without affections, a man is dead.

We see the world of mankind to be exceedingly busy and active; and the affections of men are the springs of the motion: take away all love and hatred, all hope and fear, all anger, zeal and affectionate desire, and the world would be, in a great measure, motionless and dead; there would be no such thing as activity amongst mankind, or any earnest pursuit whatsoever. . . . And as in worldly things, worldly affections are very much the spring of men's motion and action; so in religious matters, the spring of their actions are very much religious affections: he that has doctrinal knowledge and speculation only, without affection, never is engaged in the business of religion.<sup>4</sup>

Edwards is here reviving the time-honored tradition of Augustine that finds religion in the whole man, in the fundamental inclination of his heart and in his love of the divine glory.<sup>5</sup> True religion is not a set of rules but a new sensibility, a new heart. A Christian must be moved. And yet for Edwards, more perhaps than for any theologian before him, this sensibility was based on both a tough-minded and an immediate perception or knowledge of the realities of the situation in which man is placed. As Perry Miller says in his brilliant treatment of Edwards, the total orientation of the self toward God, or true salvation, is a kind of knowing, but a knowing that is a direct, experiential, first-person, sensible perception of the cosmos in its hard-core brutality. This perception informs the inclination from the guts, for it is an informing that never swerves from the savagery of life but faces it immediately and directly. Speaking of Edwards' third and fourth affections, Miller writes as follows:

It is love of the order, of divine things for their beauty and sweetness, arising out of a perception of their "moral excellency." Not the perception of excellency within the soul, or of the idea of excellency, suspended before philosophical contemplation, but of the excellency of the cosmic method, which contains cholera, burning tigers, the evil deeds of men, and death. . . . The supreme test,

4. Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, ed. John E. Smith, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 2 (New Haven, 1959), p. 101.

5. John E. Smith, Introduction to Edwards, *Religious Affections*, p. 45.

then, is a sense of the beauty of the universe, and because this is a sense and not an imagination, it is a sense of reality.<sup>6</sup>

The importance of Edwards' insights for our concerns is his insistence that trust in God (and we might add, love of man) is true only when it is deeply, immediately, experientially informed by the realities of the situation in which one must respond. Recent commentators on Edwards have refuted charges that he opposes heart and head, or affection and reason.<sup>7</sup> Quite the contrary; Edwards insists that unless trust or faith is informed directly and sensibly, it remains dry and unproductive.

The notional understanding has mere information and grasps the meaning of terms without thereby inclining the self one way or the other; spiritual understanding contains within itself the new sense or new creation which has a "taste" for the beauty and moral excellence of divine things. Spiritual understanding involves the will and the heart. It retains its meaning as understanding so far as it grasps the nature of things and makes judgments about them, but it does so as a *participating* rather than as a merely *observing* or speculative power. Spiritual understanding means that the heart of the individual is intimately related to what is understood. When the heart is involved, the individual must be present also. . . . The enlightened mind now includes the presence of a new sense or taste; direct sensible perception is the channel of illumination.<sup>8</sup>

Edwards' "direct sensible perception," derived from Lockean epistemology and from his understanding of salvation as a "new sense" that permits a man to perceive the world directly as under divine rule, is not, of course, what we mean by the wisdom of the world as it comes through literature. And yet there is a significant analogy, for the sort of knowledge that Edwards believed was requisite for the Christian is "felt" knowledge, immediate and realistic perception of the situation of man, which he called the "new sense" and which is a blend of passion and clear-sighted awareness of reality. It is Edwards' insistence on lively and total affection informed by direct acquaintance with reality that provides us with an analogy for the sort of wisdom about man and his situation with which we are concerned. Edwards held to an informed

6. Miller, *Jonathan Edwards*, p. 192.

7. Smith, Introduction to Edwards, *Religious Affections*, p. 13.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

love, and so do we. He believed that the informing of this love was God's gift of a "new sense" which allowed a man to perceive the same world in a different light. This is certainly at the heart of the New Testament understanding of the new creation, a new orientation of the self toward God and toward the world. But the new orientation is never a fait accompli; it must be informed continually, concretely, directly, realistically, contemporaneously. This continuous informing of love involves, I believe, some lowly, mundane work in order that the new orientation of the self will be as tough-minded and as gracious as it is called upon to be.

But as we have mentioned, many Christian thinkers do not believe the acquiring of an informed love to be a problem for the Christian. The contemporary theologians who have written most perceptively about discipleship—Kierkegaard, Bonhoeffer, and Barth—all insist that the one thing needed for discipleship is immediate and total following of Jesus Christ. This is true enough, as our essay has also emphasized, but there is more to discipleship than willing oneself over to God in Jesus Christ. There is also the living out of this new orientation, and it is my contention that this living out is such a mundane, concrete, contemporary business that only an intimate acquaintance with the situation in which we are to do this living out can give us the equipment for a realistic and profound response.<sup>9</sup>

But all do not see it this way. For instance, Kierkegaard's notion of discipleship is "otherworldly" with a vengeance. To Kierkegaard, the discipleship which falls under his Religion B is, on the one hand, acceptance of the paradox of the God-

9. One treads a dangerous path here. To insist on knowledge as a prerequisite for an appropriate response is not to say either that knowledge leads to such a response (see Chapter 4, pp. 188-201) or that responding itself is not a way of learning how to respond, for it is. There is psychological wisdom in the typical Hebraic exhortation to be up and doing. But acknowledgment of the truth of this insight should not be a means of escape from acquainting oneself with the concrete situation in which one must respond. In actual situations, the two ought to mesh so that knowledge and response reciprocally fortify each other in the continuing dialectic of concrete actions. It is necessary to keep this qualification in mind in the following critique of Kierkegaard, Bonhoeffer, and Barth, for my comments are directed against their lack of concern with knowledge, not against their proper emphasis on spontaneous response.

man and, on the other hand, the imitation of the humiliated, suffering state of this God-man.<sup>10</sup> It is preeminently separation from the world, both in its sacrifice of the intellect in accepting the paradox and in following one who was totally rejected by the world. This notion of discipleship hinges on Kierkegaard's insistence that there is an infinite yawning abyss between God and man, an infinite difference, which apparently the incarnation did nothing to overcome.<sup>11</sup> Kierkegaard heaps all the categories of finite existence—temporality, duty, commitment, the mundane, and the concrete—into his ethical stage, which is entirely separate from Religion B. The latter involves not only a literal *imitatio Christi*—"witnesses-to-the-truth" experience suffering and rejection as did their Lord—but a trust in God that does not involve love of fellows. Kierkegaard believed, for instance, that the highest test of love was to love no one, that is, to love a dead man.

In order really to test whether a man's love is steadfast, one must remove everything whereby the object might in any way help him to be steadfast. But all this simply does not apply with respect to the dead where there is no *actual* object. . . . The work of love in remembering the dead is thus a work of the most disinterested, the freest, the most faithful love.<sup>12</sup>

Love is not primarily oriented toward the needs of the other here, but is concerned with the purity of one's own response.

The Gestalt of the religious man that emerges is not that of a concrete man living out his discipleship in an actual, temporal world surrounded by other concrete beings whom he is called upon to love, but is that of a lonely abstraction who has no world impinging on his trust in God and no fellows whose needs and joys make demands on him. Chapter 17 of John makes some observations on the relations between Christians and the world that are pertinent criticisms of Kierkegaard's stance. According to the Fourth Gospel, Christians are not of the world (17:14, 16), but they are in the

10. Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, ed. Walter Lowrie, trans. David F. Swenson (Princeton, 1941), pp. 507, 516-19.

11. Søren Kierkegaard, "Training in Christianity," *A Kierkegaard Anthology*, ed. Robert Bretall (Princeton, 1951), pp. 408-09.

12. Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, trans. David F. Swenson and Lillian Marvin Swenson (Princeton, 1949), pp. 268, 288.

world (17:11), and Jesus prays that they not be taken out of the world (17:15). Their place then seems to be a solidly mundane one and one with a purpose: Jesus sends them into the world even as he was sent into the world (17:18). Presumably, then, they are both in and for the world; in it so they can be for it, in the sense of binding other men to themselves and to God through the love of Jesus Christ. Kierkegaard seems to miss these distinctions, suggesting that because Christians are not of the world, neither are they in and for it. Kierkegaard's "martyr" notion of discipleship may be a special case in many respects, but his separation of Christian discipleship from the world and his consequent nonchalance with regard to learning about the realities of the world make his view typical of a whole group of thinkers.

We find some of the same motifs, though stated less stringently, in Bonhoeffer's understanding of discipleship. Bonhoeffer, like Kierkegaard, insists that the essence of discipleship is adherence to Jesus Christ. This adherence is chiefly adherence to his cross, which involves rejection and suffering, bearing and forgiving the sins of others.<sup>13</sup> Discipleship is immediate obedience to Jesus Christ, apart from all ruses, whether intellectual or moral, by which man tries to escape from the exigencies of the command. It is difficult to deny Bonhoeffer's point. He is speaking against all those who seek a program of discipleship, all those who would substitute knowledge about what to do for the passion to be up and doing it. Bonhoeffer makes his point perfectly clear by recalling the moral difficulties posed by the rich young man (Matt. 19) to escape the cost of obedience, for whom "doubt and reflection take the place of spontaneous obedience."<sup>14</sup> He recalls also the lawyer's intellectual query about who his neighbor is (Luke 10:29). Concerning that question, Bonhoeffer comments:

We have literally no time to sit down and ask ourselves whether so-and-so is our neighbor or not. We must get into action and obey—we must behave like a neighbor to him. But perhaps this shocks you. Perhaps you still think you ought to think out beforehand and

13. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, trans. R. H. Fuller (New York, 1957), p. 71.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 64.



know what you ought to do. To that there is only one answer. You can only know and think about it by actually doing it. You can only learn what obedience is by obeying. It is no use asking questions; for it is only through obedience that you come to learn the truth.<sup>15</sup>

Bonhoeffer's comment indicates one of the major points made by the parable of the good Samaritan. There is a self-evident truth here: action itself brings with it a kind of learning for which cold reflection is no substitute. Moreover, reflection can and often does serve as an evasion of obedience. But does it follow that reflection has no place in the Christian life? Is Bonhoeffer's dictum that "to follow in His steps is something which is void of all content"<sup>16</sup> a true reading of the New Testament or an imperative capable of resulting in appropriate and sensitive Christian action? Is spontaneous obedience the highest kind of Christian obedience? Spontaneous obedience is an old tradition in Christian ethics, particularly in Protestantism, for it received laurels from the hands of Luther himself.<sup>17</sup> It was raised to what is, in some eyes, almost canonical status by Kierkegaard, whose disjunction between objective knowledge and passionate commitment led him to insist that interpretation must never take the place of earnestness, that Christian action does not need understanding so much as it needs motive power.<sup>18</sup>

Barth agrees. He does not add substantially to Bonhoeffer's treatment of discipleship but underscores in his inimitable way both the absoluteness of the call to follow Jesus and the lack of content in this call. There is no program, ideal, or law, nothing general about the call, but only the concrete and specific call to this or that man to be with Jesus. What the specifics of the call are can be learned only by listening, by

15. Ibid., p. 69.

16. Ibid., p. 51.

17. Luther's plea for Christian liberty is a diatribe against works-righteousness, but within this context it also supports, at least by implication, a love ethic that is more an overflow of gratitude than the result of careful scrutiny of the situation in which love is to operate. "Nevertheless the works themselves do not justify him before God, but he does the works out of spontaneous love in obedience to God, and considers nothing except the approval of God, whom he would in all things most scrupulously obey" (Luther, "Christian Liberty," p. 269).

18. Søren Kierkegaard, *For Self-Examination: Recommended for the Times*, trans. Edna and Howard Hong (Minneapolis, 1955), pp. 23-38.

being open to hear the directives of the call. Discipleship does not involve interpretation or discussion, only simple obedience.<sup>19</sup>

There are important differences between Kierkegaard, Bonhoeffer, and Barth which our analysis has not pointed up. Kierkegaard is basically nonethical, while Bonhoeffer and Barth really have ethics in view, as their sections on specific or concrete ethics show. For Kierkegaard all that counts is faith, while the other two have the world more in view. But these differences do not alter my basic contention that none is concerned with contemporary understanding of the concrete situation as the preliminary to response.

However, the spontaneous obedience of the Protestant tradition, epitomized in the treatments of discipleship by Kierkegaard, Bonhoeffer, and Barth, is a protest, and a rightful one, against legalism in ethical reflection. It is a protest, for instance, against the way reason has operated in natural law ethics. In the encyclical *Casti Connubi* ("On Christian Marriage"), one can see the cause of the protest, for here reason degenerates into casuistry. Speaking of abortion, Pius XI reflects that there is never a justification for this act, even though the health and possibly the life of the mother may be at stake, for the law of nature prohibits killing. The casuistry of the position is evident in the decision to let the mother die rather than abort the fetus; both are in fact killing, which the law of nature prohibits, but one is allowed and the other is called murder.

As to the "medical and therapeutic indication" to which, using their own words, we have made reference, Venerable Brethren, however much we may pity the mother whose health and even life is gravely imperiled in the performance of the duty allotted to her by nature, nevertheless what could ever be a sufficient reason for excusing in any way the direct murder of the innocent? This is precisely what we are dealing with here. Whether inflicted upon the mother or upon the child, it is against the precept of God and the law of nature: "Thou shalt not kill." The life in each is equally sacred, and no one has the power, not even the public authority, to destroy it. It is of no use to appeal to the right of taking away life, for here it is a question of the innocent, whereas that right has regard only to the guilty; nor is there here question of defense by

19. Barth, *Dogmatics*, IV/2, 533 ff.

bloodshed against an unjust aggressor (for who would call an innocent child an unjust aggressor?); again there is no question here of what is called the "law of extreme necessity" which could even extend to the direct killing of the innocent.<sup>20</sup>

The static, deductive, legalistic type of reasoning operating here may be an unfortunate example of natural law ethics, but it is in the spirit of a long tradition in Roman Catholic ethics. Thomas Aquinas is far more cautious than is Pius XI in making direct connections between natural and human law, but his formulation of the relationship has a legalistic, deductive flavor that could degenerate into the casuistry of *Casti Connubi*. Thomas writes that "the essential characteristic of human law is that it is derived from natural law."<sup>21</sup>

But it should be noted that there are two ways in which anything may derive from natural law. First, as a conclusion from more general principles. Secondly, as a determination of certain general features. The former is similar to the method of the sciences in which demonstrative conclusions are drawn from first principles. The second way is like to that of the arts in which some common form is determined to a particular instance: as, for example, when an architect, starting from the general idea of a house, then goes on to design the particular plan of this or that house. So, therefore, some derivations are made from the natural law by way of formal conclusion: as the conclusion, "Do no murder," derives from the precept, "Do harm to no man." Other conclusions are arrived at as determinations of particular cases. So the natural law establishes that whoever transgresses shall be punished. But that a man should be punished by a specific penalty is a particular determination of the natural law. Both types of derivation are to be found in human law. But those which are arrived at in the first way are sanctioned not only by human law, but by the natural law also; while those arrived at by the second method have the validity of human law alone.<sup>22</sup>

It should be noted that Thomas says elsewhere that "the more specialized the conditions applied, the greater is the possibility of an exception arising."<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, his view

20. Pius XI, *Casti Connubi*, December 31, 1930, in *The Papal Encyclicals in Their Historical Context*, ed. Anne Fremantle (New York, New American Library, 1960), pp. 240-41.

21. A. P. D'Entrèves, ed., *Aquinas: Selected Political Writings*, trans. J. G. Dawson (Oxford, Basil Blackwell and Mott, Ltd., 1959), p. 131.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 129.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 125.

of the sort of reflection operative in ethics is a static, deductive, and legalistic one, as is indicated by his terms in the above quotation: "general principles," "determination," "demonstrative conclusions," "formal conclusion," "derivation."<sup>24</sup>

It is understandable why Luther and Calvin reacted against such a notion of reason in the Christian life, allowing it to operate in the secular sphere but insisting on the freedom of the Christian man and the autonomy of the Christian life. Neither Luther nor Calvin revised the legalistic, deductive notion of reason along more empirical lines, but merely separated reflection from the Christian life by placing the two ethics—the secular and the Christian—side by side.<sup>25</sup> Their failure is curious, for both Luther and Calvin wanted Christian love to operate directly in the world. While this understanding should, on the face of it, have led to greater concern with the realities of the situation that love was to pervade, in practice it did not. As Ernst Troeltsch points out, Calvin was more concerned than Luther for the actualities of secular life,<sup>26</sup> but both men

24. In fairness to Thomas and the Roman Catholic natural law tradition in general, one should note a contemporary trend toward a less casuistic, more empirical view of reason in Roman circles. In an excellent essay, "Natural Law and Moral Law," Jacques Maritain all but breaks the deductive link between natural and human law. "The positive law in force in any particular social group, whether it be a question of customary right or written right, has to do with rights and duties which are bound up in a *contingent*, not a necessary, manner with the first principle of the practical intellect: 'Do good and avoid evil.' And it has as its author not the divine reason but the human reason" (*Moral Principles of Action*, ed. R. N. Anshen [New York, 1952], p. 75). Maritain is more impressed by existentially determined moral regulations wrought out in the tensions of moral life than he is with moral principles deduced in a casuistic manner from the natural law. He is not thereby diminishing his conviction that the natural law is ontologically present in human beings, but he is saying that it is known by reflection in action rather than by reflection in cold blood. A similar tendency toward a less deductive, more experiential and dynamic view is evident in John XXIII's encyclical *Pacem in Terris*. In this encyclical he concentrates not on constants in human nature which provide a point of contact with God's Eternal Law and a source for deducing positive laws, but on the person of man which we *discover* through experience and reflection to be mysterious, precious, and unique. It is through this experiential discovery that the rights and duties corresponding to this dignity of man are promulgated ("*Pacem in Terris and Unity*," *Ecumenist*, 1 [1963], p. 74).

25. Troeltsch, *Social Teaching*, 2, 523-39, 602-17.

26. *Ibid.*, pp. 604-07.

understood the heart of Christian action as the spirit of Christian love filling the shell and fitting into the gaps of the worldly machinery set in motion by secular reason.

If we can take Troeltsch's analysis as basically sound, then Christian ethics has never operated with a real concern for the understanding of the concrete situation as a necessary preliminary to an adequate response to God and man.<sup>27</sup> Protestant ethics particularly has stressed the importance of Christian love as directly relevant in and to the world, but curiously it has also encouraged spontaneous activity, independent of the assistance of reflection about the actualities of the world. Emil Brunner's insistence that Christian action is largely the spirit of love qualifying the structures of the world is typical of the extreme wing of those who stress that spontaneous and immediate love is the heart of Christian action.<sup>28</sup> But need spontaneity rule out reflection? Can there not be an understanding of reason that would avoid legalism and yet help to mature a Christian's actions? The problem for those Protestants who have justifiably rejected the static, deductive, legalistic operations of reason is that they have nevertheless accepted such operations as typical of reason. But reflection can just as well mean a lively "looking at" the world and man to see what they are about in their own integrity. It can be a mundane, open-ended perception that does not impinge on the freedom of the Christian man in his dynamic and immediate relationship with God and his fellows; rather we would insist that reason is crucial to the responsible exercise of the freedom of the Christian man.

27. "Today, therefore, the main problem of the Christian Ethos is still the problem of supernaturalism, and of its unavoidable result, asceticism, in the metaphysical-dualistic or in the disciplinary rigorist sense, an asceticism which is never merely a simple denial of the world and of self. On the other hand, its second main problem is how to supplement this religious one-sidedness with an ethic of civilization which can be combined with it" (Ibid., p. 1001).

28. "The believer's most important duty . . . always remains that of pouring the vitality of love into the necessarily rigid forms of the order" (Emil Brunner, *The Divine Imperative: A Study in Christian Ethics*, trans. Olive Wyon [London: Lutterworth Press, 1953], p. 233). "All this is only the framework for a life of 'heartfelt brotherly love' which is filled with an ardent desire to penetrate through all the nooks and crannies in the official order to reach the 'Thou' of the other person, 'personally'" (Ibid., p. 228).



If reason in Christian action is understood simply as learning about the actualities of the situation in which one is called upon to make one's response of trust in God and love of man, then there is no reason why Protestants should be afraid of it. In fact, given their insistence on the immediacy of Christian love in the concrete, mundane life, it should be a first imperative of the Christian life to find out about this concrete, mundane life from whatever sources are available, in order that love may be realistic and appropriate.

What we need, then, is a more fluid notion of reason that can take the place of the static and legalistic one that has plagued Christian thought for so long. Let us understand by reflection or reason, merely "looking at" the concrete realities of the situation we are in and to which we must respond. This "looking at" does not provide us, of course, with motives or principles for action. The motive and the principles are given in the Bible and in the continuing interpretation and reinterpretation of Scripture throughout subsequent history to the present day. The motive is the desire to respond in trust and love because we have been loved by God. The principles are direct but general, summed up in the two aspects of the Great Commandment. There are no middle axioms, and yet, as we shall see, surrogates for middle axioms are provided in the New Testament. There are patterns for action that do not give us programs, laws, or rules that tell us how to act, but that do offer us illustrations and stories of the world, of God and man, and of man's needs and joys that act as a spur to the imagination. If an appropriate trust in God and love of fellows is as much a matter of imagination as it is of will, then to know the world in which we must respond and the hearts of men to whom we must respond is a crucial aspect of such a response.

It is this stress on the imaginative, sensitive, and appropriate response, derived from a concrete understanding of the situation in which and to which Christians must respond, that makes contextual ethics a valuable trend in ethical thinking. Contextual ethics is not a school of thought; the term covers a spectrum of thinkers which includes H. Richard Niebuhr, George F. Thomas, Joseph Sittler, Paul Lehmann, James M. Gustafson, Kenneth Underwood, and Josef

Pieper. Indeed, James Gustafson has suggested in a recent article that the contextualist label has become increasingly less useful, for it is an umbrella covering men whose motives differ widely.<sup>29</sup>

There are, of course, many varieties of contextual ethics, from Niebuhr's value theory to Underwood's sociological and economic analyses. But the main point is always that reason, understood as knowledge of principles, cannot replace reflection, understood as concrete insight into the particularities and realities of the situation at hand. The key words are "fitting" or "appropriate." The right action toward men is the fitting one, the one that pertains to their actual needs and potentialities.<sup>30</sup> Or, as H. R. Niebuhr writes:

What is fitting, useful, complementary to an existence can be determined only if disinterestedness, abstraction from desire, is practiced and the nature and tendency of the being in question are studied.<sup>31</sup>

In this view, duty aims at the realization of values not in the abstract, but in the lives of persons. The duty to love others is primarily concerned with the fulfillment of persons. This understanding of the Christian life, rather than neglecting reflection in preference for spontaneous obedience or fearing it because of its misuse in natural law ethics, insists on its centrality for a truly appropriate and imaginative response. And by reflection these contextual thinkers always mean a clear-sighted, objective "looking at" reality, whether this be a perception of the economic and political actualities or of the more personal needs and potentialities of individuals.

Not all the voices raised in favor of reflection are Protestant. A particularly interesting Roman Catholic one is that of Karl Rahner who, while clearly against the deposition of universally valid moral laws in favor of what he calls "an extreme situation-ethic," insists that the individual is under obligation to refine the technique of "the charismatic art of

29. James M. Gustafson, "Context Versus Principles: A Misplaced Debate in Christian Ethics," *Harvard Theological Review*, 58 (1965), 171-202.

30. George F. Thomas, *Christian Ethics and Moral Philosophy* (New York, 1955), pp. 434-36.

31. H. Richard Niebuhr, "The Center of Value," *Moral Principles*, ed. Anshen, p. 165.

'discernment of spirits.' " This art has nothing to do with "the casuistical application of theoretical norms to the individual 'case,' " but is "the ability to hear and recognize God's call to this man alone."<sup>32</sup>

When we say the Church may not and does not want, as Dostoievsky puts it in his story of the Grand Inquisitor, to relieve the individual of the burden and the duty of having to be an individual, this implies an imperative for *him*; he is not allowed at all times to take shelter behind the moral rulings of the Church. He is not necessarily clear in his conscience if there is no directive; he is not necessarily justified before God even if he has kept all the laws expressible in abstract terms. Over and above the Commandments preached by the Church he has still to ask: Lord, what do you want *me* to do? He must know that moral theology and casuistry, however necessary they both may be, are no substitute for the gift of discernment of spirits in the sense we explained before; there must be in him and for him a fundamentally private life of prayer and moral decisions.<sup>33</sup>

"The gift of discernment of spirits" of which Rahner speaks, while significantly different from the more secularly oriented reflection advocated by the Protestant ethicists, stresses also the imaginative, sensitive, and appropriate response.

What one learns from this sort of reflection will not tell a man what to do. Its product is insight, not programs. A comment by James Gustafson is pertinent here.

Ethical inquiry does not dissolve discrepancies of purpose, nor does it determine proper procedures of action. But it enables men to have some objectification of their moral world, inner and outer, and thus contributes to the effectiveness of their action by clarifying their understanding of it.<sup>34</sup>

The quality of this insight is also suggested in Josef Pieper's splendid little book called *Prudence*. Prudence, as he understands it, is our "situation-conscience," or the ability to see reality clearly. It is primarily the willingness to be "still," to be "silent" and look at a situation before we decide. The good in concrete situations is infinitely various, and only the man who has the virtue of prudence, the wisdom gained from

32. Karl Rahner, S.J., *Nature and Grace: Dilemmas in the Modern Church* (New York, 1964), p. 20.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

34. James M. Gustafson, Introduction to Niebuhr, *Responsible Self*, p. 17.

being still and looking, can make up his mind sensitively and realistically.<sup>35</sup>

The sort of knowledge gained from literature is close to this wisdom that Pieper talks about. It is the subtle education of our "situation-conscience"; it is what happens to our sensibilities when we are still and absorb the intricacies and complexities of the human spirit and the depths and subtleties of evil as dramatized in a good novel. The sort of knowledge gained is not in terms of programs, rules, or gimmicks that tell us what to do or think; it is an insight into man's being that influences our attitudes toward our fellows and an awareness of man's situation in the world that forces our "Yes" to God's rule to come from the heart and not off the tops of our heads.

The influence is not direct; it is more subtle and more pervasive. T. S. Eliot has put it well when he says that art influences life, but not by giving us theories to live by; the influence is more like the influence of music upon us. For those who love Beethoven's music and have lived with it a long time, there is a meaning in it that they may not be able to conceptualize but which eventually becomes a factor in molding their attitude toward the world and toward other men.<sup>36</sup> This may be an extreme example, for the influence of music is necessarily more indirect than that of literature, but I think the analogy is sound. It is not, for instance, Tolstoy's philosophy of rural as against city life in *Anna Karenin* that stays with us, but his extraordinary depiction of the intricacies of the human spirit, which seeps into our sensibility and subtly influences our attitudes toward our fellows.

In summary, one dilemma of the Christian is to find a concrete and relevant way of actualizing his discipleship, of responding in total trust to God and love toward his fellows. It is the task of realizing a mode of response that finds its standards in faith but is realistic and appropriate in the world. One necessity for such a response, but by no means the only one, is an informed love: maturity in the understanding of man and of man's situation in the world, knowledge that

35. Josef Pieper, *Prudence*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York, 1959), pp. 25-30.

36. Eliot, "Poetry and Propaganda," p. 105.

comes from vivid and intimate comprehension of the realities. What literature can do for the Christian is to deepen and confirm his sensibility by its dramatic depiction of the complex needs and potentialities of man and of the powers of good and evil by which man is pervaded and surrounded.

I shall have much more to say about this. The main point I wish to make here is that if reflection is understood as concrete knowledge about the actualities of the world and of men, then literature, with its revision and reflection of the structure of human experience in both its cosmological and anthropological aspects, can be a valuable aid to the maturation of Christian insight. Let us now turn to a consideration of the reasons why literature is a peculiarly appropriate aid to the kind of reflection that Christians require. I shall approach this subject by suggesting that in the New Testament itself the kind of knowledge about the world and man, about God and man, offered to man as an aspect of his response is the same "felt" knowledge, the same knowledge by acquaintance and empathy, the same knowledge by perception of concrete actualities that is offered in literature.

### *GUIDES FOR THE CHRISTIAN LIFE*

A dilemma of the Christian is the concrete implementation of his discipleship when that discipleship is understood primarily as a change of heart to be actualized and not merely as a set of rules to be followed. It is the problem of making love realistic and appropriate but not undercutting its spontaneity, of instructing the total inclination of the self toward God and toward other men but not crystalizing that inclination into a program of action. It is the problem of an informed love. Our task, then, is to see how the basic sensibility or inclination of a man, which for the Christian is his trust in God and his love of his fellows, can be informed in an immediate and passional way. But how is this to be? How can love be informed in such a way that it retains its freedom and passion and yet achieves a definite shape and character oriented to the realities of the situation? The clue to the resolution of this dilemma is given in the New Testament itself, for the mode of instruction in the



New Testament is one that informs by concrete acquaintance with reality, the reality of man with God and of man with man. It is a mode that allows for and presses toward the unfolding of freedom and spontaneity; it spurs the imagination and at the same time delineates the contours of love by concrete acquaintance with the actualities of God, man, and the world. The mode we refer to takes several forms in the New Testament. Three of the most important forms are "confession," "parable," and "the story of Jesus."

By confession we mean primarily Paul's letters, which are the passionate, experiential confession of a Christian who is attempting to implement his discipleship in the midst of a concrete situation. Paul's confession is his analysis of, and reflection and action upon, the story of Jesus in relation to the realities of his particular situation. He is, as are all the great confessors of the Church—Ignatius of Antioch, Augustine, Francis of Assisi, Luther, Bonhoeffer, and others—an example for Christian discipleship of all times. The example that he offers is not, of course, to be imitated in detail, and it consists not so much of the content of his life and insights as their form. The context in which Paul himself calls upon others to imitate him indicates this. When he writes, "Brothers, join in imitating me, and mark those who so live as you have an example in us" (Phil. 3:17), he has just concluded a passage describing his intention to press onward to make the righteousness of God his own because "Christ has made me his own" (Phil. 3:7-16). It is the way he presses on, the way he attempts to actualize his trust in God and love of fellows that can be an example to others. For Paul, like the other confessors, was a disciple whose freedom from principles, ideals, and programs—what he sums up under "law"—was almost notorious; and yet his love was an informed love. It was a trust in God informed by a hard-headed look at the brutality of the principalities and powers of the world. And it was a love of fellows cognizant of their specific needs, joys, despairs, and delusions.

I am not suggesting that the content of Paul's letters is unimportant, but that for the purposes of Christian discipleship they are important largely as the confession of a man who trusted God and loved men with all the freedom and

spontaneity that any "Lutheran" could wish for, and yet whose love was as tough-minded, as unsentimental, and as realistic as any natural law ethic. His confession, to be sure, does provide crucial content for our discipleship. His insights into the reality of God, specifically God's graciousness in releasing men from the powers of the world to which they are enslaved, and into the reality of man's heart, specifically the predicament of desiring renovation of the spirit and of not being able to will it, are insights unequalled in perception and expression. But chiefly we should stress that his confession is instructive because it offers us direct acquaintance with the way one man implemented his discipleship, a man whose trust and love were informed and educated by a wide and immediate knowledge of the world and of the hearts of men. The form as well as the content of Paul's letters offers us an example of knowledge by direct acquaintance, for the confessional form brings the reader into immediate relationship with the experience of the author, and the content of Paul's experience is his profound grasp of the reality of God's love and of man's deepest needs and desires.

A second mode of instruction found in the New Testament is the parable. A parable is "a story of some familiar or at least intelligible incident which serves by comparison or contrast to illustrate some truth less familiar or less readily understood and appreciated."<sup>1</sup> The simplest parable is a simile or metaphor. It is never an allegory, for the comparison in a parable is of one central point alone, not of the details; the details only lend vividness and drama to help the hearer place himself in the situation. Thus, parables instruct by first demanding identification with the characters, then imagination in making the comparison, and finally concrete and immediate response to the personal implications of the parable. The teaching of Jesus is insistently and characteristically parabolic. Even his "sayings" have a pithiness, a directness, and a use of concrete detail that usually salvages them from generality (Matt. 5:21-26, 38-42, 43-48; 7:1-5, 7-12, 24-27). Jesus used the parabolic form, as Günther

1. H. G. Wood, "The Parables of Jesus," *The Abingdon Bible Commentary*, eds. Frederick Carl Eiselen, Edwin Lewis, and David G. Downey (New York, Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1929), p. 914.

Bornkamm suggests, to avoid all theological or moral principles.

His word is always specific, where as a rule we cannot get beyond commonplaces or a casuistic righteousness. This is why his teaching hits the mark in its incomparable way. Here is the secret of the conciseness and vividness, the cutting edge and the healing power of his words. Nowhere is to be seen in them the neutralising and isolating layer of conventionalism so frequently found, especially in religious speech. They always convey the original freshness of real spontaneity. Never is there the correct, the all too correct preaching *about* God. God is always present and so is man, in unmistakable reality.<sup>2</sup>

The mode of his teaching is dramatic. It is to present the reality of God in relation to man in such a direct, contemporary, and inescapable way that men will be moved to apply the situation to themselves and do something about it. As Dibelius points out, the characters of the stories were not particularly exemplary fellows, for their behavior was intended not to edify but to evoke identification with the man of mediocre wickedness; thus the hearer would feel that the situation of the parable was also his own situation.<sup>3</sup>

These various traits of parables and of Jesus' parables in particular—mundanity, immediacy, drama, vividness, avoidance of generalization, and demand for imagination—indicate that they are a mode of instruction meant to inform trust in God and love of fellows not through rules or programs, but through "felt" knowledge. Primarily, of course, the parables of Jesus deal with the relation of God and man; but we also learn something of the heart of men from them, and we learn about both God and man through direct acquaintance with them, that is, through stories about them. The stories are paradigms that can serve as spurs to the imagination for personal application but never as examples to be slavishly imitated or as principles from which rules for concrete action can be deduced. One of the uncanny and unnerving things about reading and rereading the New Testament is the stubborn specificity and immediacy of

2. Günther Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. Irene and Fraser McLuskey with James M. Robinson (London, 1960), p. 105.

3. Martin Dibelius, *The Message of Jesus*, trans. F. C. Grant (London, 1939), pp. 149-50.

Jesus' teaching. What stick in the mind are not the general implications of a tale, but the emotions of fear, relief, gratitude, trust, hate, astonishment, and humility that the characters feel toward the gracious or judging "Lord" of the story. The parables of Jesus are par excellence a mode of instruction meant to inform love not by cold-blooded reflection or by the deduction of principles, but by acquainting men directly with the actualities of God and of man.

A third form of instruction in the New Testament for the Christian life is the story of Jesus. Such an unsophisticated nomenclature is purposively chosen to underscore one aspect of the significance of Jesus Christ that is often overlooked. The story of Jesus refers to one level on which the Synoptic Gospels can and ought to be read—the level that depicts Jesus as the realized man, as the man who trusts God and loves men as God ought to be trusted and men loved. It is the level that gives a portrait of what Paul calls the mind of Christ or the quality of his life. It is not a biography or an analysis of his inner life, but a picture of one who lived as man ought to live.

I am not suggesting that the main concern of the Synoptic Gospels is to paint a portrait of the realized man. On the contrary, the primary aim of the Gospels is to proclaim God's gracious act in Jesus Christ whereby he establishes his rule over men's hearts and wills. Each Gospel implies a whole Christology. But at the same time that each Gospel proclaims Jesus as Savior, it also delineates him as the man, the one in whom the nature and quality of human response to God and man are revealed. And the mode of revelation concerning true human response is the same as the mode concerning true divine graciousness—the mode of an actual human life. Jesus literally embodies true manhood as well as true divinity. That is, his concrete life is, as man, a life totally oriented in trust toward God and love toward men and, as God, a life that can be described, in George Hendry's words, as "the living of forgiveness."<sup>4</sup>

The story of Jesus is not a whole Christology, though it is an essential part of it. It is not an inclusive portrait, depict-

4. George S. Hendry, *The Gospel of the Incarnation* (Philadelphia, 1958), pp. 115 ff.

ing his saving act culminating in the cross and resurrection and continued by the operation of the Holy Spirit in the Church. It is a partial portrait oriented toward the significance of the story form in general and the content of his story as realized man in particular. It is a portrait that seems peculiarly relevant for Christians who are seeking ways of informing their trust in God and love of fellows in concrete but nonprogrammatic ways. But it does not necessarily follow that merely because this portrait is partial it is therefore false. I have previously stressed the centrality of Jesus Christ as Savior; it is now legitimate to look at him also as realized man.

The sort of picture I have in mind is not far from what Niebuhr calls "a moralist's picture of Jesus Christ" in his *Christ and Culture*. The virtues of Jesus, he writes, are "the excellences of character which on the one hand he exemplifies in his own life, and which on the other hand he communicates to his followers." These virtues—love, obedience, faithfulness, trust, humility—are all manifestations of his radical monotheism, his total orientation toward God, and they receive their concrete determinations from this radical openness to God.<sup>5</sup> Also, the kind of portrait I have in mind is suggested by the following passage from Jonathan Edwards about Jesus Christ.

He whom God sent into the world, to be the Light of the World, and Head of the whole church, and the perfect example of true religion and virtue, for the imitation of all, the shepherd whom the whole flock should follow wherever he goes, even the Lord Jesus Christ, was a person who was remarkably of a tender and affectionate heart; and his virtue was expressed very much in the exercise of holy affections. He was the greatest instance of ardency, vigor and strength of love, to both God and man, that ever was.<sup>6</sup>

Niebuhr and Edwards, in concentrating on the virtues, affections, or emotions of Jesus, point in the right direction. As our study of the New Testament has indicated, the basic orientation of men, or, as Edwards would say, "the affections of men [which] are the springs of motion,"<sup>7</sup> is the key to

5. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, pp. 14-15, 19.

6. Edwards, *Religious Affections*, p. 111.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 101.



discipleship. It is the quality of the trust, joy, gratitude, and wonder of men toward God and the quality of the compassion, love, and forgiveness of men toward others that is the heart of the Christian life. It is, in other words, the depth and scope, the realism and imaginativeness, the sensitivity and reflectiveness, the spontaneity and immediacy of trust and love that matter. In the story of Jesus, we have the portrait of one whose affections can be so described, and it is for this reason that his story is the story of the realized man. The fact that the mode of instruction about true manhood is a story and not a list of virtues or a set of principles means that form and content mesh. The content of the story (from our partial perspective) is the life of a man who trusted and loved profoundly, realistically, spontaneously, reflectively; the form of instruction is a story, a mode that informs by educating the sensibility to be imaginative, reflective, realistic, and spontaneous.

To be specific, let us look at the portrait of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels. There is on the face of it not one but at least three portraits. The Gospels are a retelling of the story that stands behind them all; each Gospel is a particular perspective on the story, a perspective determined at least in part by the interests of the various authors. Thus, the main emotion of Mark's Gospel is wonder at the supernatural yet agonizingly human Jesus (it is Mark's Jesus who looks with pity on suffering men and who needs to ask questions for information). The genre of Mark's Gospel is the miracle play. It could easily be acted out in pantomime, with gestures and facial expressions to suggest the strong emotions of wonder, awe, fear, relief, joy, and compassion that dominate it.

The main emotion of Matthew's Gospel is fear of Jesus as the judge who demands complete obedience and will tally up the record when the kingdom appears. The story in Matthew is told as a morality play, with the characterization of both Jesus and of other men powerfully stylized, relatively flat, and two-dimensional. It is the Gospel in which the story is told with the least immediacy, spontaneity, and realism. Unlike Mark's Gospel, where Jesus is portrayed on the Alexandrian pattern of christological thought as supernatural and yet profoundly human, Matthew's portrait of Jesus has

Docetic tendencies. He is the unmoved, all-knowing judge who does not seem to participate fully in human reality and limitations.

The Jesus of Luke's Gospel is the model for Antiochene Christology: his life is the expression of love that is human yet divine. The love of God is not a miracle, as it is in Mark; it is found in the activity of Jesus, which is thoroughly natural, yet, as Erich Auerbach would say, quivering with "background."<sup>8</sup> The main emotion of Luke's Gospel is love, as both the compassion of Jesus for the suffering of men and the joyful gratitude of men who have been forgiven and healed by him. The story of Jesus is told here as a drama, a play of words and actions that has a spontaneity and immediacy not found in the other Gospels.

These differences are important, but they do not result in three separate stories of Jesus. All three Gospels have elements of the miracle play, the morality play, and the drama. All include wonder, fear, love, and many other emotions or affections. All present Jesus as the man in whom God is present. It is the unified portrait that is the main thing, and it should not be obscured by particular stresses of the Gospel writers. Indeed, the characteristic differences and similarities in the three portraits demand the unified portrait. No thoughtful reader of the Gospels can deny that all three speak of the same man, a man whose outstanding characteristics are a joyful abandonment of self to the power and love of God in spite of all temptations and fears and a spontaneous, imaginative compassion for the suffering of his fellowmen. What Jesus demands of others in terms of total trust in God recorded in the Beatitudes, the imperatives on seeking the kingdom first and bearing the cross, and the comforting words about God's care for every hair on a man's head, is exemplified in his own life of complete reliance on the goodness of God. He was a man whose every act and word revealed a profound awareness of the powers of the world, the demonic forces as well as the temptations of fame, and the simple wish to continue in existence. Yet his realism served to make his trust in God more total and joyful. Likewise, what Jesus de-

8. Auerbach, *Mimesis*, p. 19.

manded of others in terms of compassionate love toward all men is delineated in his own story. His parables point to love as total, spontaneous, and imaginative, but his life also images this love. All three Gospel writers insist on Jesus' pity for suffering men, a compassion that is concrete, spontaneous, and realistic. The story of Jesus tells of a man who was moved with pity for this individual leper (Mark 1:41), who loved a particular rich young man with a particular problem (Mark 10:17-31), who understood the special dilemma of the tax collector Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10), who responded to the guilt of a woman of the city (Luke 7:36-50), who pitied hungry people (Mark 8:2-3; Luke 6:20-26), who not only appreciated the special qualities of children but put his arms around some particular children (Mark 10:13-16).

What we have in the story of Jesus is a paradigm of a life lived as the Great Commandment demands that human life be lived. It is a life to be imitated not in its details, but in its quality. It is a mode of instruction that informs by suggestion, by situation, by identification. Niebuhr suggests the power that the story of Jesus has exercised over Christians.

It is impossible to describe with any adequacy the variety and richness of the imagery derived by Christians from the story of Jesus and employed by them not only in their descriptive language but in their apprehensions, evaluations, and decisions. From the recognition of an infant's value and destiny with the aid of images of manger and cross of Christ, to acceptance of death as a dying with Christ, to the discovery of a quality of existence that like Christ's cannot be conquered by death, to the understanding of man's place and responsibility in the cosmos as a son of God, the symbolism of the gospel story pervades the Christian consciousness in all evaluation, action, and suffering.<sup>9</sup>

The story of Jesus, like the other modes of New Testament instruction, the confession and the parable, is a form that instructs by involving the reader at the level of his basic emotions, for its content is the basic orientation of man toward God and toward others. The three modes of instruction are similar in informing a man's love through direct

9. Niebuhr, *Responsible Self*, p. 156.

acquaintance with situations that are spurs to his imagination. They are also similar in content, for all are about informed trust in God and love of man, about profound trust in the actuality of God and sensitivity to the needs of men.

The instruction in the New Testament, then, is very close in form to the wisdom about the world and man that we have suggested is the function of literature in the human enterprise. Both instruct or educate the sensibility not by rules or programs, but by the delineation of concrete, realistic situations of the actuality of men in relation to the cosmos and to other men, which demands of the spectator imagination and empathetic identification. If this is so, one might ask both how the two forms differ and in what way literature's peculiar merits are helpful to the Christian life.

Christian literature and literature as an art form differ in intent as well as in content. While Christian literature is didactic, artistic literature is not. While Christian literature presents a normative view of the cosmological and anthropological responses of men, artistic literature does not. The intent of a literary work of art is not usually to convert, nor is its content trust in a merciful God and love of one's fellows. Its intent is to investigate the structure of human experience, and its content is man experiencing, experiencing himself, his world, and other men. The insights of literature are insights into man's heart and his situation in the world. The peculiar merit of literature, then, is its concentration on the realities of human experience. This experience has its cosmological and anthropological thrusts, but these thrusts are always inquiries into the complexity and the subtleties of man's situation.

It is precisely this inquiry into the intricacy of man's situation that makes literature relevant to the Christian life. For the New Testament, though an ample guide in terms of motives for discipleship, paradigms for action, and forms of instruction, does not provide us with the concrete, intricate, contemporary knowledge of the powers of the world and of the hearts of men that we need if our love is to be truly appropriate and imaginative. It does not investigate the negativities of life as a preliminary to a realistic, profound

trust in God, nor does it enter into the labyrinths of the hearts of men in preparation for an appropriate response to their deepest needs. Literature however does both of these things.

As man's primary response is trust in God, he needs to be acquainted with the principalities and powers that seem to rule man's situation in the world in order that his affirmation that God is in charge be something more than sentimental hopefulness. He needs to be able to say with Paul and to say on the basis of deep and distinct knowledge that "I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:38-39). What a reading of Melville or Kafka can do for the Christian is to acquaint him with the powers of darkness or at least the indifference that seem to rule the world, an acquaintance that tears aside the protective veil we place between ourselves and our fear of the arbitrary, the demonic, or what Rosa Coldfield in Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* calls the sickness at the heart of things. In order for his response to God to be appropriate, the Christian must take full account of the concrete, contemporary situation of man in the world and hence be able to include the white whales and the Warsaw ghettos in his "Yes" to God's rule. Given the rampancy of dark forces in our contemporary world, the novels that force us to look hard and deep at the negativities are crucial to Christians, for otherwise our response to God's power and goodness and the image we present to the world will be irrelevant and shallow.

The way in which literature can inform the Christian's second response, his love of his fellows, is perhaps less clear. The New Testament is not long on detailed knowledge of the heart of man, knowledge we need if our love of others is to be appropriate and realistic. It is not the purpose of the New Testament to delve into the heart of man, but it is the purpose of literature to do just that. To love man appropriately, we need insight into and sympathy with his needs, despairs, and joys. This, literature can give us. It by no means tells us what to do with the knowledge of man it gives



(that we have in the New Testament—we are to love man), but it is one means of becoming acquainted with the human condition, so that our love may be more realistic and imaginative.

It is important that we do not overstate the relation of the Christian life and literature or put the relation at the wrong place. Literature has its own being and glory apart from the Christian: it glories and wallows in the finite and particularly in the human, and if it is to have any relation to the Christian man, it must be at this point. The Christian also has his own being and glory apart from the arts: he is the man who has opened himself to the redeeming love of God, yet he is also called upon to adhere to God no matter what and to love his fellows. Literature is not at the heart of the Christian life, not at the secret moment between God and a man when the man is constrained to put total trust in God's love, but it is relevant to the working out of that moment in the man's attempt to know his world and man more fully that he might trust God and love man more appropriately. This, then, is the point at which the cultural disciplines of philosophy, science, art, and so forth are relevant to the Christian's task. They acquaint us with man's situation in the world and with all his needs and actuality, so that our trust in God and our love of man may be more discriminating and realistic. One becomes a Christian through a lifelong process of working out the gratitude for Christ's love toward oneself, a process carried on in the light of knowledge about the world and man culled from every quarter.

So much for the summary of the relevance of literature to the Christian. It will be the task of the final chapter to flesh out this skeleton. Before concluding, let us recall that the intent of this chapter was to depict the central contours of Christian discipleship and the ways in which a form of reflection or wisdom about man's situation in the world might aid the implementation of this discipleship. The nature of this wisdom or informed love perhaps is not adequately suggested by the generalizations of the last few pages. It is more adequately intimated by a sketch of the "moral virtuoso" by James Gustafson.

The rarest and most delicate flower of the moral species is the moral virtuoso, the moral genius. He is that person who seems to be able to bring good almost out of nothing, and certainly out of evil. He is not necessarily equipped with erudition in ethical literature, nor is he always highly visible, inserting himself as the Savior in each and every situation. He is gifted. He has wisdom that enables him to be discriminating in his responses and his actions. He has tolerance and understanding that enlighten and qualify his life, without crippling its sense of responsibility and its decisiveness. He has courage that fortifies his insight. He has a sense of the appropriate—rebellion when the time calls for it, conservation when the time calls for it, critique when it is fitting, resignation in joy when it is called for. He may not be a "man of principle," indeed, most likely he is not, for the rigidity of ideological principles stultifies his genuine love and creativity. He can suffer with those who are the victims of evil; he has a sense of the tragic. His greatness is not in eloquence nor in aesthetic portrayal of that which he feels. He probably is not always eager to be the reformer of the world's ills, and his indignation is coupled with appreciation. But he creates confidence; seems to provide the assurance that chaos need not envelop order, nor order extinguish creativity. He is free: from excessive self-consciousness, from self-justification, from legalism, from the necessity to proclaim the universal validity of his own freedom. But he does not drift; he portrays an integration of mind and will and spirit, of life and thought, that are obviously governed by deep convictions that provide coherence. Experience is one of his teachers, but he is more than the total of his memories. Sensitivity he has without sentimentality; indignation without bare rebelliousness; hope without illusion; realism without despair; reasonableness without rationalism; joy without shallowness; humor about life without sarcastic laughter; confidence without complacency; effectiveness without pride; humility without self-hatred; loyalty without blind commitment; delight in others without craving for community; solitude without loneliness; knowledge without pretentiousness. In religious terms he may be the man who embodies Love, man who portrays what man essentially is meant to be. But he does not always appear under Christian institutional auspices, or Jewish, or Hindu either. He is more appreciated than analyzable; he singularly defies explanation, and almost defies description. His greatness is pointed to more properly in narratives than abstractions. Such is the moral virtuoso.<sup>10</sup>

Anyone who can read this description of man as he was meant to be and be unaware of its impossibility is indeed insensitive. It is, as Gustafson points out, a portrait of realized man, of

10. James M. Gustafson, "Types of Moral Life: An Essay in Slight Exaggeration," *Religious Education*, 57 (1962), 409-10.

"the man who embodies Love," and of the few saints whom the world has known. It is not an ideal to be attained by moral effort, and yet neither is this portrait to be discarded as irrelevant. Christians believe that the grace of God can operate in even our unpromising spirits to mold them more nearly to the true pattern of manhood and that men are called upon to use what wits, insight, and graciousness they have to further the process. One cannot attain moral sensitivity through learning, for it is primarily a gift of grace; yet life in Christ, life in the Spirit, calls on us to broaden and deepen the degree of faith, hope, and love that we have been given through whatever ways are available to us. Perhaps the wisdom about man and the world found in literature is one such way.

## CHAPTER 4

# Literature and the Christian Life

*A NOVEL* is not a form of Christian instruction. To say, as I have said, that literature offers wisdom about man and the world that the Christian needs in the task of actualizing his discipleship is not to say that the intent of a novel is the Christian's edification or the edification of anyone else. Moreover, the phrase "wisdom about man and the world" perhaps suggests that a novel is a handbook of eternal truths about the issues of life. It certainly is not this either.

It is time to recall and deepen our discussion of the unique nature and function of literature, so that the relationship we work out between it and the Christian life will be the central one and not one determined merely by the needs of the Christian life or by the literary nature of Christian forms of instruction. This recollection and deepening requires that we be specific, that we review in relation to the novel our main tenets of literary theory, and that we look at various novels to see how these tenets hold up. We have already sketched in broad outline the relationship between literature and the Christian life. But thus far we have not emphasized sufficiently the special qualities of aesthetic knowing—complexity, concreteness, novelty, and indeterminacy. It is, then, time to enlarge upon the peculiarities of aesthetic knowing in the novel by narrowing our focus to particular novels, for if our skeleton is to walk, it must have flesh and blood.

The intent of this chapter, then, will be to show specifically how our conception of the relationship between literature and the Christian life, which we believe has been developed from the integral core of each, holds up to concrete scrutiny. In the first section of this chapter, we shall

attempt to show the distinctiveness of aesthetic knowing by means of illustrations from novels. The second section will be devoted to a treatment of the relationship between aesthetic knowing and Christian doing. Finally, in the last section, I shall make some comments on the image of man that are implied in the entire study.

### THE NOVEL AND THE CHRISTIAN

A novel and a Christian have something in common. They are both concerned with response. A novel presents man experiencing, man responding to his world and other men; a Christian is a man responding to God and other men in trust and love. There is, then, a built-in point of contact between literature and the Christian life, for both are concerned with basic orientations of man's being. But here the similarity ends. In content, the novel always is concerned with human reality or with other reality only as it is experienced by man; in form, the novel delineates human reality in its intricacy and concreteness. Both the content and the form in which the content is depicted are never merely a reflection of life, for while a novel is concerned with man experiencing and thus in content and form mirrors human reality, it presents this reality through its own aesthetic object. A novel is not life, though its content is man and the form in which it presents man is a reflection of the basic structure of human experience, its complexity and difficulty. A novel is life at a remove, and it is the remove that makes all the difference. The remove is the new thing it says about human reality, which of course cannot be separated from the new and concrete way that it says it. And it is for this new thing said in this new concrete way that we value novels.

On the other hand, the Christian life as presented in the New Testament lacks both the novelty and the intricate concreteness of literature. Its content is also man responding, but responding only in a stipulated way, the way of complete trust in the God who is made known in a particular act in history and the way of forgiving and ministering love to one's fellows. The New Testament has a simplicity and directness that centuries of sophisticated interpretation have not been



able to obscure. Dibelius points out that the sayings and parables of Jesus were meant not to confuse, but to present as straightforwardly as possible the true relationship of God with man and man with man.<sup>1</sup> As the content of the Christian life is particular and definite, so also is the form of the response. Neither the confessions, the parables, nor the story of Jesus investigate the subtleties and complexities of concrete life in the world. Their intent is to present as paradigms the correct form of response, not its difficulties and intricacies. The Christian life, then, is a life of response, but the literature directly pertaining to its formation is not concerned with the novelty or the intricacy of response. It does not say new things about human response, but (determinedly, against all heretics) the same old thing; nor does it present the response in a complex fashion, but insists, against all sophistication, on the simplicity of the response.

However, it is the contention of this essay that Christian literature itself, while stipulating one response which it presents in a direct and simple way, indicates by its own forms of confession, parable, and the story of Jesus and their insistence on profound, imaginative response in the real world, the necessity of knowledge that does bring to light the novelty and intricacy of response. And it is here that the novel is relevant to the Christian. Novels, and of course we mean good novels, present a variety of responses of man to his environment, because, as we indicated earlier, the novelistic image of man is a dramatic one. Hence, there is no one image of man as experiencing or responding; there are innumerable images. Each novel offers a new and imaginative pattern of response, one possible Gestalt of response. Thus, through novels, a reader acquires a vision of the whole panorama of the human condition, an education in his fellowmen, insight into the possibilities of response to the cosmos and to other men.

As such, there is certainly nothing Christian or even religious about this kind of knowing. In fact, the raising of new, imaginative patterns of response often seems to endanger the simplicity and directness of response that a Christian

1. Dibelius, *Message of Jesus*, pp. 148-49.

believes is required of him. Novels can entice us into realms unheard of, into Kafka's labyrinthine torture chambers of the spirit, into Mann's stench of decay and death, into Conrad's jungle of terror, into Camus' plague-infected world, into Dostoevsky's nightmares of the intimacy of the innocent and the demonic. They also propel us, further perhaps than we wish to go, into the complex hearts of our fellows, into the subtle moral agony of Henry James' characters, the infuriated and passionate despair of James Baldwin's Negroes, the stoical resignation of Hemingway's men and women, the pettiness inextricably fused with grandeur in Tolstoy's noble souls, or the grandeur somehow emerging from pettiness in John Updike's and Arthur Miller's pathetic creatures.

Our cliché-ridden, stereotyped vision of the world and of our fellows does not easily digest these new responses to life. Primarily we do not digest them easily because of the way they are rendered, because of the difficulty of the imaginative statement. The content is made hard to digest because of the form; the problem is not principally the novelty of the response, but its concrete, intricate, ironical depiction. We can all bear to listen to (and in fact most of us feel strangely comforted by) sermons or essays on the agony of human life, on the terrors of the deep, and on the inextricable mixture of good and evil in the human spirit. But when the eternal verities are offered in the form of a story with all the messiness and drama of the actual structure of human experience—and that structure standing clear of all rationalizations and escapes—then we want to say that Dostoevsky or Baldwin is not true to human experience, that he exaggerates the subtle maneuvers of the powers of darkness or the mundane drama of human need and pain.

In a word, it is the relentless concreteness of novels that makes them so hard to take, that is both their fascination and their danger. And it is precisely their concreteness in telling this story of this man with inexorable attention to the particular terrors that confront him and the particular persons he mistreats even as he loves that is the clue to the unsubstitutable knowledge that novels offer us. No doubt all of us have been moved and informed by Milton's *Paradise Lost*, as much perhaps by the sonorous, stentorian cadences that mir-

ror so well the decisiveness of Adam's fall from innocence as by that fall itself. Milton is no mean dramatist, and *Paradise Lost* is no mere theological treatise. But there is a magnificence and largeness about it, a mythical, timeless quality to it that exempts us from its bite. This is not true of Thomas Sutpen's loss of innocence in Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*, not true of his battle against the cosmic forces that tempt him beyond man's given limits and against his blind irresponsibility toward others. There is in Sutpen's story none of the black-and-white clarity of good and evil found in Milton's poem, no warning angel voices from heaven, no "moment" when he loses his innocence. Rather, there is only the gray murkiness of his particular character, his concrete situation, and his response to that situation, rendered with such dramatic density that in this story, perhaps more than in any other novel, the meaning of the tale is only in its telling and retelling. Quentin's futile search for the truth of the story is not a gimmick, but the heart of the matter, for its meaning is found only in the entire drama of Sutpen's concrete responses and not in any clue, message, or theme.

It is, then, not information in the usual sense about the world and man that is the distinctive mark of aesthetic knowing as we find it in novels. Aesthetic knowing is better described as getting in on the feel of human experience, experience that is new because it goes beyond the usual limits of our tight little islands and is rendered with far greater complexity and difficulty than we dare to cope with in our everyday lives. The concrete feel of human experience in new reaches beyond our imaginations, rendered with the difficulty and complexity that we latently know but often will not acknowledge—this is what makes novels relevant to the Christian life. If the history of Christian myopia and sentimentality is any indication of the sickness of the Christian life, then fresh insight into the deepest crannies of the human spirit and into the darkest powers at work in actual existence, presented in a concrete and difficult fashion, is just what the doctor ordered. A strong dose of black-stap molasses in the form of Melville's *Benito Cereno* might do much to undercut a Christian's shallow, sentimental clichés about the goodness of God and eventually, perhaps, make his response to God's

goodness a realistic and profound one. Or an evening spent reading John Knowles' little gem, *A Separate Peace*, might initiate a cure for a Christian addicted to hiding his own and others' secret motives for fear of uncovering some unpleasant fact about man that his little world would not easily include. This initiation might eventually make his response of love to others more commensurate with their actual needs and despairs.

What all this boils down to, of course, is something quite simple, though by no means easy to describe or lay hold of. It comes down to the problem of our sensibility, our sensitivity to the subtleties and complexities of concrete response to God and man in the real world.<sup>2</sup> The increase of sensibility is not an extrinsic function laid on literature for the benefit of the Christian, but it is an intrinsic function that literature can perform for all men, as I pointed out previously when I said that the function of art is to give new insight into the basic structure of human experience.<sup>3</sup> But there is little doubt that Christians are in need of what literature can do for them. Nathan A. Scott, Jr., puts it very nicely when he says that "the root problem of our present religious situation may be one of re-newing and reinvigorating that deep and interior order of human sensibility and human feeling." He goes on to say that the artist trains and educates us in the ways of feeling and sensibility.

2. "Sensibility" is a much-abused, catchall word in contemporary literary criticism. It often has negative overtones of subjectivity or solipsism, as in a comment by Diana Trilling on Norman Mailer. "Even his Hipsterism, concerned as it is with styles of personal being, rejects the premise of a self at the mercy of society, and refuses the sanctuary of sensibility" ("The Radical Moralism of Norman Mailer," *The Creative Present: Notes on Contemporary American Fiction*, eds. Nona Balakian and Charles Simmons [New York, 1963], p. 149). But by "sensibility" I mean to suggest something closer to the word's parentage. As I use "sensibility" I mean merely to heighten its derivation from "sense": sensibility is the capacity for keen, delicate, or acute emotion or feeling. It has no negative overtones; in fact, as it is related to "sense" and "sensible," it has positive ones. It can legitimately take on their meanings of sound and intelligent perception and reasoning, correct judgment, and common sense. It is also related to "sensitivity" with its meanings of susceptibility, receptiveness, and responsiveness. So, by "sensibility" I mean to suggest that susceptibility in man for acute and sound feeling.

3. See Chapter 2, pp. 102-08.

In quickening the imagination, the artist trains the human intelligence to make precise discriminations about the dimensions of experience that transcend the gross materialities of life, and thus he may become one of the theologian's best allies in the liberation of man from the predominant platitudes of a positivistic culture.<sup>4</sup>

If the situation of the Christian in his attempt to respond to God and man is one in which he is always tempted to make the easy, shallow, and cheap response, to avoid the hard work that an imaginative and realistic response requires, then the tough-minded insistence of the novelist on the truly human against the fantastic and illusory, as William F. Lynch puts it,<sup>5</sup> makes the novelist an ally, willing or not, of the Christian.

For what the artist is essentially interested in is the expression, involving judgments but in the most visible and concrete terms, of the total life and movement of the soul as it engages with the reality outside of itself, especially with the reality of each current moment of history. I do not think it too much to say that indeed the artist wishes to "save" that soul, in the sense that he wishes to keep its various acts of sensibility straight and real and ever moving with a freedom that really belongs to the children of God.<sup>6</sup>

To keep the sensibility straight, to quicken the imagination, "to make the precise discriminations about the dimensions of experience that transcend the gross materialities of life," to insist on the complexity of concrete life in a real world—this is the offering of the novelist to men, which, as Roland M. Frye says, we ignore to our peril.

The clarification of life, a deeper understanding of the human situation, the charting of pathways between reality and the human soul, the treatment of the universally human in the simple language of humanity—these are characteristics of great literature. So understood, literature provides insights into the human situation which we ignore only to our peril and to the foreshortening of our understanding.<sup>7</sup>

4. Nathan A. Scott, Jr., "Art and the Renewal of Human Sensibility in Mass Society," *Christian Faith and the Contemporary Arts*, ed. Finley Eversole (New York, Abingdon Press, 1962), pp. 25, 27.

5. William F. Lynch, S.J., *The Image Industries* (New York, 1959), pp. 140-44.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 140.

7. Roland M. Frye, *Perspective on Man: Literature and the Christian Tradition* (Philadelphia, 1961), p. 59.



But how do novels help one acquire this sensibility, this knowledge that is not information but closer to a feeling or awareness of the realities of human experience? It is certain that one does not acquire it by reading novels as though they were treatises on the world or on human nature or by concentrating on criticism about the novels. If it is the feel of human experience that is the crucial thing about novels, then the wisdom they offer cannot be catalogued in terms of ideas or doctrines on the powers of the cosmos or the nature of man. It is for this reason that a literary critic whose criticism consists in telling the reader what the story means by offering ideological clues misses the mark. An extreme example of such criticism, and therefore useful as an illustration, is the search for the meaning of Kafka's *The Castle* by theologians, sociologists, and psychologists, all functioning as critics. Ronald Gray in his book *Kafka's Castle* insists that such a quest is not literary criticism, for proper criticism "attempts to say what the castle means, not to the writer, but to the people in the novel; to ask not what things stand for but what they do and how they function; to remain on the surface of the novel and not to probe for what might lie beyond."<sup>8</sup> Gray allows that a critic may speak of the meaning of a work, but only in terms that are entirely intrinsic to the work and arise from a close examination of it. Gray also quotes a particularly nice comment by F. R. Leavis in which Leavis insists on attention to the detail of a work.

The business of the literary critic is to attain a peculiar completeness of response in developing his response into commentary; he must be on his guard against abstracting improperly from what is in front of him and against any premature or irrelevant generalizing—of it or from it. His first concern is to enter into possession of the given poem (let us say) in its concrete fullness, and his constant concern is never to lose his completeness of possession, but rather to increase it.<sup>9</sup>

When a critic paraphrases a novel or discovers the key to its "true meaning," he is not getting at its meaning, for its true meaning cannot be paraphrased or categorized. At the

8. London, 1956, p. 13.

9. F. R. Leavis, *The Common Tradition* (London, 1953), p. 213, as quoted in Gray, *Kafka's Castle*, p. 2.

most, it can be approached by the critic when he focuses on the nuances of the story itself, bringing to the reader's attention the subtleties of plot, characterization, and development, and the intricacies of syntax, images, and rhythms.

In other words, the most that a critic can and ought to do is to help a reader to go back and read the novel with what Vivas calls "intransitive attention," for such attention is the only path to its meaning. The meaning of a novel is every detail, byway, and concrete response in it. Regardless of the subject matter or paraphrasable theme of a novel, it is the way that subject matter is presented in the aesthetic object that is its meaning—the insight into it by concentration on the complexities and subtleties intrinsic to it. When we speak of the subject matter or theme of a particular novel, we say of course that Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* is about the machinations of good and evil in the lives of three brothers and their father, or that John Updike's *Rabbit, Run* is about a man's desire for freedom and his fear of responsibility. But that is not saying very much. What really matters is bringing to light the way this subject matter has been "shown" to us as Henry James says, rather than "told" to us. A critic can help us to see the way a novelist has shown us, but his comments can never be a substitute for experiencing the novel oneself. It is to the experience that the critic should always return his readers, for the meaning of any novel is not what it says but what it does with what it says.

This attitude is the inevitable result of believing that the main thing to do with novels is to read them with thoughtful absorption and not to analyze them with extrinsic concerns and categories. The only meaning really intrinsic to them, the novelty and intricacy of this or that man experiencing, will come through in its particularity and subtlety only by attending to the detail of the novel itself. This may be a common man's approach to the novel, for it certainly decries the hegemony of criticism as the open sesame to the truth of a novel; but intransitive attention to the novel requires, if anything, more intelligence and hard work than does reading criticism about it.

If we look at a few novels more closely, we can see more clearly how a novel can offer to a reader the feel of human

experience and how this sort of wisdom is relevant to the Christian. We shall consider briefly four novels—Tolstoy's *Anna Karenin*, Melville's *Moby Dick*, Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*, and Malamud's *The Assistant*.<sup>10</sup> Only one of these novels, *Moby Dick*, is ostensibly what we might call a religious novel. All great novels, to be sure, are in some way or other concerned with both the negativities of the world and the heart of man, with both man's response to cosmic powers (the cosmological response) and to other men (the anthropological response). But as Christians often concentrate on the religious novelists (the Melvilles, Dostoevskys, and Kafkas), it is important to see how the so-called secular novel can be relevant to the Christian. It is perhaps more apparent how cosmological or religious novels are relevant to him than it is how any other novel can be. Any good novel is relevant to the Christian, and it is relevant precisely in the particular way that it is good. That is to say, the premium should not be placed on religious subject matter as the criterion of relevancy, but on excellency of execution regardless of the subject matter. Because the Christian is called upon to love man as well as to trust God and because he must know man in order to love him properly, any and every aspect of the human situation that is portrayed with depth and profundity is relevant to the Christian. Practically speaking, this means that criticism of a particular novel should attempt to clarify the way in which this novel is good, what perspective on the human situation—whether it be man's dealings with God, other men, or himself—it delineates with excellence. Thus, the so-called secular novel is as relevant to the Christian as is the religious novel. Theoretically, the relevance should already be obvious in what has been said so far: novels educate our sensibility in the contours of the human spirit for the sake of a more appropriate response of love to our fellows.

Tolstoy's *Anna Karenin* is a novel whose main concern is not depiction of the negativities of life, but the portrayal of

10. What follows does not pretend to be literary criticism of the order and in the detail outlined above. I am not a literary critic and I cannot do the job of one. The following comments on four novels are illustrative of the method of criticism that I consider most helpful, but they do not themselves comprise such criticism. At the most they are hints in the direction of such criticism.

the nuances and intricacies of the heart of man. To be sure, it is also concerned with man's situation in the world, with religious questions: Levin doubts the existence of God; Karenin undergoes a conversion; Anna feels the inexorable law of retribution upon her in an almost classic Greek fashion; but these are not the crucial things. It is not the fact that the novel deals with religious questions that makes it great, but the way it deals with them. Tolstoy's almost uncanny ability to show the complexity of human motivation and growth is what sets this novel apart. To some extent, of course, this can be said of all novels. *Moby Dick* is not great simply because it raises the question of cosmological evil; it is great because of its particular imaginative grasp of evil. Yet one can say, I think, that the center of interest in *Moby Dick* is the question of evil, not the psychological nuances of human contact with the evil. But in Tolstoy, the center of interest is always the way man meets a situation, regardless of what that situation is. *Moby Dick* is painted largely in black and white; *Anna Karenin* is a chiaroscuro, done in the grays and shades of human intricacy.

One example of Tolstoy's excellence in disclosing the intricacy of human motivation is Karenin's conversion. When Anna seems to be dying after giving birth to Vronsky's child, Karenin forgives her. The forgiveness seems total and pure.

He was not thinking that the Christian law which he had been trying to follow all his life enjoined on him to forgive and love his enemies; yet a glad feeling of love and forgiveness for his enemies filled his heart. He knelt down and laying his head in the curve of her arm, which burned like fire through her sleeve, he sobbed like a child.<sup>11</sup>

We are moved and perhaps think that here is the message of the book—Christian forgiveness. It is beautiful and convincing. But on the very next page, we read:

He paused, hesitating whether to disclose his feelings. "But I saw her and forgave her. And the happiness of forgiving has revealed to me my duty. I forgive her completely—I would turn the other

11. Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenin*, trans. Rosemary Edmonds (Baltimore, 1956), p. 438.

cheek, I would give my cloak if my coat be taken. I only pray God not to deprive me of the joy of forgiving."<sup>12</sup>

Where is Anna? What is uppermost here is the good feeling Karenin gets from forgiving and from repeating the appropriate biblical texts. It is the first hint of the complexity of his conversion. As the novel progresses, we see that his conversion is a mixture of sincere repentance, self-righteousness, genuine love, hypocrisy, and fear. Which is the real motive? All are real, says Tolstoy, and in his insistence on the complexity of Karenin's motivation he has created a character so real that what we remember is not the conversion or any idea of genuine or false Christian love, but the particular way one man met a situation, how he decided and qualified his decision, how he became what he was.

Tolstoy has the ability to dramatize his ideas to such an extraordinary degree that one can never select a passage and say, "This is the message." The message is the whole novel, the way in which each character grows and changes from the beginning to the end of the book. The point of the book is not given in individual passages; its truth is the entire drama in its depiction of man in all his complexity. One need only think of Levin and his philosophy of rural life: the only philosophy Levin finally has is what he is and has become throughout the entire structure of the novel. Cleanth Brooks has said that the poetry of inclusion, the poetry that mirrors the good and evil, the irony and paradox, the pettiness and grandeur of life is the great poetry, because it reflects the complex reality of man.<sup>13</sup> On this criterion, *Anna Karenin* is a great poem because its peculiar genius is precisely the manifestation of the shadow of hypocrisy in every good deed (Karenin's forgiveness) and the light of value even in corruption (Anna's adultery).

Tolstoy's genius for searching the psychological depths operates on all levels, from Levin's religious doubts to Anna's adultery to Kitty's growth from adolescent to woman. And perhaps his extraordinary talent is best proved in what T. E. Hulme calls the "small, dry things," in such a scene as Dolly coming upon two of her children who are secretly and glee-

12. Ibid., p. 440.

13. Brooks, *Well Wrought Urn*, p. 256.



fully sharing a dish of pudding—a scene that offers her some consolation for her husband's infidelity. The connection between children sharing pudding and marital infidelity is a connection that makes sense only in the logic of human joy and despair, a logic that Tolstoy understands very well. He is excellent in the intricate details of the human spirit, and it is this that makes *Anna Karenin* a great novel and one relevant to the Christian. This novel offers us an education in our fellowman, an opportunity to grow in wisdom in the subtleties of the human spirit, so that our sensibility may become more sensitive to the real needs and joys of men as we seek to love them.

Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* offers the reader something very different. To be sure, it is about man experiencing, as are *Anna Karenin* and all great novels, but here the generic "man" is most appropriate. This novel is not concerned with the subtle responses of particular characters set in a definite time and space, but with Man and the Cosmos. Hardly a topic for a novel, one might say, but Melville's ability to carry it off is the excellence of his novel. *Moby Dick* is a cosmological novel with a vengeance: it raises the question of the why of things; it is concerned with appearance and reality; it is a symbolic presentation of man's search for absolute knowledge.

Such a novel and such an interpretation of it would seem to refute everything we have said about the sort of wisdom that novels offer. It seems to suggest that this novel, at any rate, is a philosophical treatise on man and the world, that it fails to offer wisdom to us through and only through the intricate and concrete details of its own story. But *Moby Dick* is not a treatise, and it avoids being one because it succeeds in a most extraordinary way in being a symbol. By saying that it is a symbol, I mean that what it signifies is so completely merged with what it is, the story of Ahab and the whale, that there is no way to tear the former from the latter and examine it on its own. Or, at any rate, if one does attempt to spell out the meaning of *Moby Dick* apart from the contours of the story, one comes up with a platitudinous question: Why is man not allowed absolute knowledge so that he can distinguish between appearance and reality, so that

he can know whether the power that rules the world is good or evil? And the answer is equally platitudinous: Man cannot bear the truth. Pip goes mad after he sees the terror that lurks below the calm sea, and Ahab, plunging his knife into the "pasteboard mask" of Moby Dick, goes with the whale to his death.

But this message of despair, of malevolency at the heart of things, is surely not the reason that *Moby Dick* is excellent. It is excellent because of Melville's ability to so invest his story of Ahab and the whale with the overtones of this malevolency that the atmosphere of the story reeks with it. To get in on this atmosphere, to feel the horror of perceiving what lies below the surface, is the experience of the novel, an experience that no summary of the meaning of the novel can re-create, for it lies embedded in every incident in the story and particularly in the imagery.

If we take the most important image, the whale himself, we can see Melville's technique. Moby Dick is first of all a real whale, a fact sometimes lost sight of in the welter of interpretations about him. Melville devotes pages to the nature and history of whales and includes Moby Dick as one of the species, even suggesting that any peculiarities he might have are only superstitions.<sup>14</sup> In fact, the success of Moby Dick as a symbol is precisely Melville's insistence on his flesh-and-blood, common whale reality, while at the same time creating an aura about him that reaches beyond the ordinary. He creates the atmosphere by stretching the facts until they burst with metaphysical suggestion. For instance, the whale is white (a fact), but by an excursus on the ambiguous and complex quality of whiteness, Melville moves the reader from the white hump that is Moby Dick to an innocently white-robed bride, to the smooth, flaky whiteness of gliding sharks, to the marble pallor of the dead, and finally to "the palsied universe [which] lies before us a leper."<sup>15</sup> The richness, concreteness, complexity, and power of these and many other images of whiteness that appear through the novel congregate around the albino whale, so that the misty white spray he shoots up becomes a subtle emanation of all the

14. Herman Melville, *Moby Dick* (New York, 1959), pp. 201-03.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 192.

horror that men feel for the unknown, for decay, for death.

What Melville does with the whale he also does with Ahab. Ahab is also a symbol, though he is first of all the captain of the "Pequod" who has lost a leg in combat with Moby Dick and has vowed vengeance to the death. He is a rare man of tragic proportions, Promethean desires, and an unquenchable thirst for truth and satisfaction. He is not Everyman. And yet in a curious way he is both less and more than every man: less because he lacks the historical and psychological density of a real human being and more because he represents that drive in all men to know the truth. Unlike Tolstoy's characters, whose time and space are personal and definite, Ahab's time and space are impersonal and global. We know little of his personal life beyond the one moment in the shadowy past when he locked with the whale and lost. Although he has a wife and child we never even learn their names. As Peleg says of Ahab, he "has his humanities," but they are not peculiarly his. His history is the history of all Promethean men; he is compared to Job, Caesar, the German emperors, the czars, and, of course, King Ahab. Ahab's space is the entire world, just as his ship circles the globe. Melville accomplishes this universalizing of Ahab in the same way he invests the whale with metaphysical and malevolent overtones—through historical allusion and the heightening of reality. There is an aura that surrounds Ahab, resulting from Melville's ability to open up the mundane realities associated with the captain—his pipe; his black harpooner, Fedallah; his intimacy with fire, sun, and lightning; his love of the treacherous sea and his reluctance to rest on land.

Neither the cosmological question that Melville poses in *Moby Dick* nor the answer he gives to it are as important as the investigation of it that he offers. He offers to every reader the experience of the horror that lies beneath the surface of life, a perception of the sharks that wait beneath the emerald calm and beauty of the sea for the daring man. It is an experience of radical insecurity, an effect that Melville attains by what we have called the heightening of reality. A whale-line can easily pull a whole crew to death, but the whale-line is also a symbol of the situation of all men:

So the graceful repose of the line, as it silently serpentines about the oarsmen before being brought into actual play—this is a thing

which carries more of true terror than any other aspect of this dangerous affair. But why say more? All men live enveloped in whale-lines. All are born with halters round their necks; but it is only when caught in the swift, sudden turn of death, that mortals realize the silent, subtle, ever-present perils of life. And if you be a philosopher, though seated in the whale-boat, you would not at heart feel one whit more of terror, than though seated before your evening fire with a poker, and not a harpoon, by your side.<sup>16</sup>

Melville makes his readers feel the terror through hammering out his story of Ahab and the whale with such attentiveness to the complexity and ambiguity in concrete, mundane realities that they give off sparks far beyond themselves.

So why is this novel important? It is important because it is an excellent imaginal investigation of a man and the cosmos, because it offers a sort of learning about man and the world not otherwise available, learning by concrete, felt experience. It is important because it presents its investigation with a richness, ambiguity, and subtlety that concepts cannot have but that concrete events and images do have. *Moby Dick* is important to the Christian for exactly these reasons—and for one more. The Christian is called upon to include the terrors of the deep in his confident avowal of God's love. If his response of trust is to be wide and deep, he needs to perceive through the "pasteboard masks" the demonic, death-dealing whale and perceive him from the heart. The Christian who celebrates the power and goodness of God over the entire cosmos needs the eyes and the heart of a Melville if his celebration is to be unqualified and total.

When we move from *Moby Dick* to *Absalom, Absalom!* we move from the cosmological to the anthropological, from the sea to the land, from the terrors of the deep to the dread that lives in the human heart, from space to time, from man with nature to man with man, from the question "Why the outrage?" to "How can man endure the outrage?" We move to a different imaginative vision of the reality of human life because we move to a different universe of discourse. Melville's universe of discourse is symbolistic; his world is therefore primarily spatial and nontemporal, as are most cosmological and symbolic novels, including Kafka's *The Castle* and *The Trial*, Mann's *Magic Mountain*, and Camus' *The*

16. Ibid., pp. 279–80.

*Plague*. But Faulkner is not a symbolist; his world is inexorably and painfully historical, and his style, packed with what one commentator has called "his oxymorons, synesthetic images, mixed metaphors, pseudosyntax, noncoherent 'explanations,' and alternative and multiple suggestions,"<sup>17</sup> is the vehicle for his vision of reality as thick with the complexity and ambiguity of historical life. I must confess that Faulkner's novels are the models behind this entire essay, in the sense that they reflect and create the logic of human experience in its difficulty, irony, ambiguity, open-endedness, and richness as a felt experience in an unparalleled way. His theme is always history, not its meaning but the feel of its texture as lived. Julian N. Hartt hits the mark when he writes as follows of Faulkner:

I guess that Faulkner had some unsettling hunches about how history is made and might end. But what he knew surprisingly well is how history is told, not necessarily and perhaps not very often by the people who do the great and terrible things in it but certainly by the people who—despite its terrors and deceptions—love it and accept it, as it is and all there is.<sup>18</sup>

If Faulkner's one theme is history, understood as the way men experience their past and come to terms with it, it is not surprising that the search for the meaning of a Faulknerian novel often ends in defeat. No novel is more typical of Faulkner's genius or more elusive to the thematically oriented critic than *Absalom, Absalom!*. Not only is it about the wrestlings of a man, Thomas Sutpen, with the meaning of his mottled past—a story told with every Faulknerian device for complicating and confusing it—but it is narrated by young Quentin Compson whose own self-understanding and self-acceptance depend on his discovery of the meaning of Sutpen's history. Quentin fails, and so will the reader who looks for a meaning. What Quentin does gain, and what the reader can also gain, is experience of an extraordinary sort in what an ambiguous and difficult business it is to live with oneself as a concrete historical being with a particular per-

17. Walter J. Slatoff, *Quest for Failure: A Study of William Faulkner* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1960), p. 242.

18. Julian N. Hartt, "William Faulkner: An Appreciation," *Christianity and Crisis*, 22 (1962), 138.



sonal and social past, set in the midst of other persons whose pasts and presents impinge on one's own. Faulkner is the anthropological novelist par excellence, the novelist not only of the self and its past but of man with man, of men bound together in real communities of earth, blood, and common time. His theme of history, then, is never the lonely quest of the self for identity, but always the self with others for better or for worse (and usually for worse). And always it is the human community that is the context for the theme of Faulkner's novels—the experience of historical life.

If it is this experience that is the heart of Faulkner's *Absalom*, what, more precisely, is its nature? To put it more concretely, what is Quentin's experience, what does Quentin learn? He learns nothing that can be conceptualized. The last words of the book are an agonized cry from the heart, not the head, a cry that he does not hate the South. His quest for meaning starts with "a few old mouth-to-mouth tales," with rags and ends of "facts," which become heavy with emotion, though by no means clear and ordered, through the interpretation they receive from his father, Rosa Coldfield, and himself as he tries to retell the tale of Thomas Sutpen to his Harvard roommate. What Quentin learns is not the meaning of the tale, not whether Sutpen was to blame for the downfall of the dynasty he sought to build, not whether Rosa Coldfield was just in her interpretation of Sutpen as a demon, not even whether one version of the tale is more accurate than another. What he does learn is what it feels like to be himself, to be Quentin Compson whose blood is mixed with the blood of every character in the tale, so that their experiences of hate, love, outrage, endurance, ambition, innocence, and cruelty—all of them intertwined in the most intricately woven fabric—become his experience.

What the reader learns is similar. He experiences through an imaginative, concrete story of a man's relations with his fellows—the relations of Sutpen with his rejected part-Negro wife, with Rosa Coldfield, with his son and daughter—the intricacy and richness of personal and social historical life. He experiences not the what of this life, but the that of it, and the that of it from the inside, from the way it feels. I know of no better comment on the quality of this experience

than one by Walter J. Slatoff comparing it to Bergson's "intuition," comprehension through entering into an object.

If the essence or inmost self of another person is a dynamic process, the ultimate act of empathy or identity would be to experience that dynamic process. To empathize would not mean merely to think the thoughts the other person thinks or to feel the specific sensory responses he feels; it would mean to share the movements, quiescences, turbulences, tensions, releases, writhings, and strainings of his inmost self. This, I believe, is the kind of response Faulkner often wants to produce in the reader. The reader's act of comprehension is not to be from without, not a detached contemplative or evaluative act, but rather an empathetic experience, a comprehension from within. He is not so much to observe and judge characters, as to feel what they feel, as nearly as possible, to be them. He is to comprehend as much as possible as Quentin comprehends the South, through somehow absorbed heritage, and as Quentin and Shreve come to comprehend Henry and Charles, through identity. Like Will Varner he is to experience what things and people "felt like." And since the ultimate act of comprehending something would be to empathize or identify with its essence, essence seen as dynamic process, much of the reader's experience is to be the experience of tensions and dynamic process within his own being.<sup>19</sup>

"To experience what things and people 'felt like' " is what Quentin learns and what the reader who concentrates attentively on the novel also learns. Faulkner's excellence, and hence the reason his novels are important to the Christian or to any reader, is his ability to capture in story form the feel and thickness of concrete historical and social existence. Another way to say it is that Faulkner opens up the hearts of his characters. He studies them from the inside, so that his novels are never plots with characters but always mosaics of deeply felt and violently expressed emotions. There may be a pattern to the mosaic, but it is obscured beneath the complexity and ambiguity of each character's contribution—his experience. *Absalom, Absalom!* then, is relevant to the Christian because of its peculiar excellence—the insight it offers into the hearts of deeply historical and deeply communal characters as each attempts to come to terms with who he is and has been, as each attempts to endure the outrage of being the particular human being he is. If the Christian is called

19. Slatoff, *Quest for Failure*, p. 246.

upon to love his fellowman not in general, but in particular, then there is perhaps no novelist more relevant to him than Faulkner, because through his novels one can become acquainted with the agony, the difficulty, the complexity of being this man, having this past, and being set in this present.

The final novel at which we shall glance briefly, Bernard Malamud's *The Assistant*, is different from the rest. *Anna Karenin*, *Moby Dick*, and *Absalom, Absalom!* are similar in at least one respect; they are heroic in tone, celebrating the downfall of mighty men and women. The nonhero of *The Assistant*, Frank Alpine, is a small-time thief turned grocery clerk whose pastimes consist of stealing nickels from the till and peeking at the boss's daughter in the shower. He is a weak-willed, shiftless, unambitious bum. This is hardly material for a great novel, and *The Assistant* is not a great story in the tradition of the other novels we have considered. But, like them, it is an imaginative rendering of an experience, in this case, the experience of the bum who turns saint, though a "picaresque saint," as R. W. B. Lewis would say.<sup>20</sup> Then is *The Assistant* pathos, is it merely the old cliché of the halo around the head of the thief, the male version of the good-hearted prostitute? It is difficult to paraphrase the novel without fitting this pattern. Frank Alpine robs a Jewish grocer, Morris Bober, secretly gets himself employed by the old man to work off his guilt and return the money, falls in love with the grocer's daughter, Helen, and finally, knowing that he is a new man because he no longer steals from the register or peeks at Helen, assumes as his own the sufferings of this Jewish family.

There is no doubt that he undergoes some kind of conversion; he is frequently associated with St. Francis of Assisi, as his name implies; he becomes a kind of suffering servant in the Bober household—all very fine material for some theological criticism. But to do a theological critique of this novel would be to miss the point of it. For the novel is not about conversion, St. Francis, or suffering; it is about Frank Alpine's experience of maturing into a man with compassion for his fellows. It is because this novel, like every good novel,

20. Lewis, *Picaresque Saint*, pp. 31-33.

is about an experience that it escapes being a cliché. That is to say, the plot of the novel is a cliché and paraphrases of it cannot avoid speaking in clichés, but Malamud has created a concrete experience of conversion so rich and subtle that it is true to the logic of human experience and therefore not hackneyed.

Frank never escapes from himself; he is never allowed by Malamud to take an easy way; he does not attain maturity and insight except through the taste and smell of who he is and has been.

His goddamned life had pushed him wherever it went; he had led it nowhere. He was blown around in any breath that blew, owned nothing, not even experience to show for the years he had lived. If you had experience you knew at least when to start and where to quit; all he knew was how to mangle himself more. The self he had secretly considered valuable was, for all he could make of it, a dead rat. He stank.<sup>21</sup>

He carries the burden of who he is and what he has made of himself through every small but important choice that makes him other than what he was. To confess to Helen that he was the one who robbed her father, to persevere in overcoming his petty thievery although his hand goes back into the till time and again, to climb out of a warm bed and sell a poor Polish woman her three-penny roll—these are the insignificant but crucial concrete decisions that finally make him a different man. Even Helen eventually realizes that a real change has taken place in Frank.

It was a strange thing about people—they could look the same but be different. He had been one thing, low, dirty, but because of something in himself—something she couldn't define, a memory perhaps, an ideal he might have forgotten and then remembered—he had changed into somebody else, no longer what he had been.<sup>22</sup>

The "memory" or "ideal" that Frank has realized in himself is suggested by the recurrent image of St. Francis that Frank keeps in his mind from boyhood days in a Catholic orphanage. Frank is a faint reflection of St. Francis in only one respect: he wins the ability to protect and love the weak and poor Bober family. But Frank *wins* it. The self-giving love

21. Bernard Malamud, *The Assistant* (New York, 1958), p. 139.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 190-91.

that St. Francis seems to have had spontaneously, Frank attains only by extraordinary effort in the muddy, difficult, ambiguous decisions of his narrow life.

With the idea of self-control came the feeling of the beauty of it—the beauty of a person being able to do things the way he wanted to, to do good if he wanted; and this feeling was followed by regret—of the slow dribbling away, starting long ago, of his character, without him lifting a finger to stop it. But today, as he scraped at his hard beard with a safety razor, he made up his mind to return, bit by bit until all paid up, the hundred and forty-odd bucks he had filched from Morris in the months he had worked for him, the figure of which he had kept for this very purpose written on a card hidden in his shoe.<sup>23</sup>

This novel, like the other novels we have looked at, is an education in the structure of human experience, in the complexity, irony, and difficulty of human response to life. It is about man experiencing, experiencing the powers that limit and fulfill life and the fellowmen who increase its agony and its beauty.

To sum up: what the reader learns from novels is finally in the realm of the education of his sensibility, not the increase of his conceptual equipment. It is a mode of knowing that is intricate and novel through its presentation in concrete, imaginative stories of a segment of human reality rendered with passion and beauty. We are caught up in wonder by this new thing we see, this new insight into the logic of human experience, which we latently know but are usually too afraid, lazy, and blind to face. We are captured into new understanding by the cunning of the novelist's ability not only to see more clearly than we do but to express his vision in a simulacrum of reality, a reflection and creation of the richness, toughness, drama, tension, and conflict of human experience.<sup>24</sup>

The heart of the novel is the creation and reflection, through the medium of concrete stories, of the logic of human experience in its cosmological and anthropological dimensions. Because this is the nature of the novel, its function in the human enterprise is that of educating human

23. *Ibid.*, p. 125.

24. Brooks, *Well Wrought Urn*, p. 213.



sensibility in the intricacies of life as lived. The novelist is not doing a job for Christians or for anyone else. He does his own job but to the degree that he does it excellently, his work can be of great importance to the Christian who is attempting to implement his discipleship by informing his trust in God and love of his fellows, so that his response to them will be profound and realistic.

### KNOWING AND DOING

It is a truism that knowing and doing are at best estranged friends. The Greeks to the contrary, Paul is the better psychologist when he insists that he does not do the good that he wishes to do (Rom. 7:15-19). The relations between knowing and doing are complex; the relations between aesthetic knowing and Christian doing are no less so. But in spite of the complexities, one thing seems very clear. There is no intrinsic connection between aesthetic knowing and Christian doing, only an extrinsic one. That is to say, the connection is not a systematic but an existential one; as Kierkegaard says, there is no necessary relation between thought and being, no mediation between possibility and actuality, except through the decision of an agent.<sup>1</sup> In spite of the similarity in both content and form between the novel and the Christian life—their mutual concern with human response to cosmic powers and to other men in a dramatic and complex fashion—this similarity at the most can result only in a possible, not in an actual, relationship. The actual relationship depends upon the decision of the Christian as reader to appropriate for his own concerns the wisdom about men and the world found in the novel. This is the chief point I would underscore, because this existential relationship is the only sort of relationship that could make a difference in the Christian's action, and hence the only sort that is actual. Whatever relationships may exist at the theoretical level, unless the connection is made a concrete fact in the life of a Christian it is not an actual relationship, however interesting it may be.

1. For an excellent discussion see Hermann Diem, *Kierkegaard's Dialectic of Existence*, trans. Harold Knight (Edinburgh, 1959), pp. 15-31.

But there are other basic reasons for insisting that there is no intrinsic relationship between literature and the Christian life. Neither art nor the Christian life, each understood in its own integrity, will permit such a connection. The upshot of our separate analyses of literature and the Christian life was that, while similarities in content and form do exist, their intent is so disparate that no systematic connection is possible. Art is a mode of knowing, and as such it is neutral, though its peculiar form of neutrality can perhaps best be described as disinterested passion. Neutrality does not mean that novelists and other artists do not care about what they are saying (as well as how it is said) or that they do not care if anyone is converted to their point of view. On the contrary, a good case could be made that all novelists are covert proselytizers, even if their gospel is only that there is no gospel or that art itself—in T. S. Eliot's words, "excellent words in excellent arrangement"—is the gospel. The point is simply that all literature is a form of knowing, not of doing, and therefore it is neutral in the sense that novels, poems, and plays present possibilities for contemplation, not programs for action (though the possibilities can be passionately conceived and vigorously held). Neutrality does not mean blandness; it means conduciveness to contemplation.

The Christian life, on the other hand, is a mode of doing, and it is committed to a definite understanding of the world and of man that requires a definite response. Here also we should dispel misunderstandings at the outset. The definiteness of the point of view and required response is not, or at least need not be, dogmatic myopia. A Christian is not a know-it-all or a compulsive activist, busy every moment implementing his wisdom. Rather, the Christian is a person with a commitment; he is defined in terms of a decision or a promise, not in terms of special information or policies for reform. He is committed in love to God and to his fellows—on this there can be no neutrality—but the way to implement his commitment does involve contemplating possibilities.

There is, then, a form of commitment in the novelist's neutrality and a need for contemplation in the Christian's decision, but, nevertheless, the distinction between them holds. If both the novel and the Christian life deal with

similar matters (man responding to his world and other men) in a similar manner (through temporal, complex decisions), then the main difference between them lies at the point of intention—the difference between contemplation and commitment. By the intention of the novel I do not mean the intent of the novelist, for there is no access to his intention, but the intent of the work itself, which, as we concluded in our analysis of aesthetic experience, was to offer for contemplation its own immanent meanings, meanings that both reflect and revise the basic structure of human experience. The primary fact of aesthetic experience is its wonder, the contemplation of or dispassionate interest in the constituents of the aesthetic object, quite apart from any extrinsic concerns. The intention of the Christian life can never be contemplation for its own sake; it is always moving toward implementing new knowledge in commitment and action. It is to these similarities and differences between aesthetic knowing and Christian doing that we must now turn, drawing together various lines of analysis and pointing up the crucial areas of contact and of separation.

As has been indicated, there is an affinity between the content of novels and the Christian life. Most novels are concerned with the two major dimensions of human response that are also crucial to the Christian, the cosmological and the anthropological. One or the other may be dominant, as the cosmological certainly is in Kafka's work and the anthropological is in Jane Austen's novels, but every novel is at least latently concerned with both responses, because both are intrinsic to man's situation in the world. I am not by any means suggesting that all novels are religious, only that all are about man experiencing and therefore all in some way touch upon the factors that limit and control life, factors such as death, physical and natural evil, moral perversity, fate, coincidence, and so on. The way in which a novelist touches on this dimension of human life may be subtle and devious, as in the works of Henry James, or thunderous and explicit, as in the novels of Dostoevsky, Conrad, and Melville. And there is in novels no right response to the cosmological powers as there is for the Christian. A novel investigates what it feels like to be man experi-

encing these givens of life, and while many novels do lean toward a right response to the powers, it is not the response as such that makes a novel great but the quality of its investigation.

The same may be said of the anthropological response. No novel is great simply because it says that men should love one another according to their real needs and potentials, and most novels are not concerned with any such imperative. What they are concerned with are the subtle operations of men in society, with the creation of authentic characters whose interactions with one another plumb the depths of the human spirit. An interesting case in point on the difference between commitment and contemplation in the anthropological dimension can be seen in a comparison of Faulkner's acceptance speech for the Nobel prize and his novels. In his Stockholm address, Faulkner commits himself to the goodness of humanity—to man's ability to endure, to his compassion, patience, nobility, and so on. The speech is a bit sticky, but noble epithets about man always are. However, his best novels are not at all sticky, although they have characters such as Dilsey, Ike McCaslin, Lucas Beauchamp, and V. K. Ratliff who fit the description of man in the Stockholm address. The difference, of course, is between being told and being shown that compassion and pity toward one another is the secret of man's stature. Again, the contemplation or investigation, not the commitment, is the crucial offering of a novel, while for the Christian the commitment is the main thing, although, I would maintain, it cannot be made responsibly apart from contemplation of the reality of man.

But there is more than an affinity of content between a novel and the Christian life. There is also a likeness in form between aesthetic knowing and Christian forms of instruction. Both are stories and so are immediate, concrete, and passionate, but the distinctive note of the novelist's story is its intricacy and subtlety, while the distinctive note of the story forms of Christian instruction—the confession, parable, and story of Jesus—is the implied commitment to which they point. A novel presents the complexity of man experiencing for our contemplation; Christian instruction presents the

answer to man experiencing for our commitment. Novels are not usually symbols or metaphors; Christian forms of instruction invariably are. In Christian instruction the concrete story is a window to another truth less familiar than the story itself but analogous to it. Thus, the biblical story of the prodigal son is important not because of the complexity of the experience of a son's return to his father, but because this story points to the true relationship between God and man. Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country* is structured on the prodigal son motif, but the importance of the story is not its fidelity to this motif, but the investigation of the experience of filial alienation and parental devotion—the agony and longing of fathers and sons.

Hence, the similarities between the novel and the Christian life in content and form are cut across by a basic difference in intent—the intent of knowing versus doing, of investigation versus action, of contemplation versus commitment. The similarities allow for a possible relationship between the novel and the Christian life, but the difference in intent militates against a systematic connection. There is a hiatus between a novel and a Christian which can be bridged only by a decision on the part of the Christian to appropriate the neutral learning of the novel about the world and man for his own concerns. Art remains art and the Christian life remains the Christian life. This is perhaps the most important point to stress, for while I do not consider the Christian life and art to be alien, as does the position I have called Christian discrimination, neither do I see them as secretly united through the single intention of an ultimate concern, as does the position I have called religious amiability. Rather, while their points of contact in content and form make a relationship between them possible, the actualization of the relationship is an existential and not a systematic matter, for it depends on the decision of the reader to appropriate the contemplation of the novel as an aid in the maturation of his own commitment.

The perspective of this essay has been from the outset an experiential and concrete one. I have not been concerned with aesthetics and religion or art and Christianity, but with literature and the Christian life. I have taken the point of



view of the person who is already a Christian and who is attempting to see how literature in its own integrity might be relevant to his task of implementing his discipleship. Taking this experiential, concrete perspective, I began my analysis of the nature and function of literature with a study of aesthetic experience; similarly, I considered Christianity as man's response to the experience of God's forgiving love. Aesthetic experience was summarized by the one word "wonder"; Christian experience, by the one word "love." There is no intrinsic connection between these two words or the experiences from which they are derived. The wonder of aesthetic experience is an openness or willingness to contemplate the immanent meanings of the aesthetic object for their own sake. It is an emotion closely associated with curiosity, spontaneity, sheer delight, amoral appreciation. When we are truly experiencing aesthetically, when our attention is intransitively riveted on the aesthetic object, we are both irresponsible and unreflective in the sense that we do not make connections with our moral behavior or with our conceptual equipment. The connections may come later, though they need not come at all. What is intrinsic to aesthetic experience is only the appreciation of new insight into some particular for the sake of the delight we feel in novelty and freshness. Of course it must be acknowledged that the new insight offered by art has power because it reflects the toughness and complexity of the basic structure of human experience. A sentimental or naïve insight will not arouse our wonder. But this means only that we are attracted by good art, not that we are attracted by art that gives us programs of action or philosophies of life. The heart of aesthetic experience is wonder at new insight, delight in seeing a new thing, appreciation of learning for its own sake.

Christian experience is a different matter. The Christian life is a response to the experience of God's love, which, though perhaps initially one of wonder and appreciation toward his love freely offered, does not rest in the contemplation of this love but moves directly and naturally to commitment and action. The Christian who does not so move, who delights merely in the emotional impact of God's love or the intellectual patterns he finds in it, is arrested at the stage of

aesthetic experience, whereas the event behind the experience demands total and not merely aesthetic response. The Christian as such can never be primarily an aesthete, either in his response to the experience of God's love or in his response to anything else, including works of art. Because being a Christian is a total commitment affecting every aspect of a man's life, his Christian concerns get into everything he does. He is hopelessly prejudiced, as is every man who has an implicit or explicit basic conviction about the way things are. I have dealt before with the problem of a body of convictions or prejudices,<sup>2</sup> but it is necessary to mention it again, for while there is no intrinsic connection between aesthetic knowing and Christian doing, there is some muddying of the waters that lie between—and from both of the tributary streams.

When we burrow deeper into the problem of aesthetic knowing and Christian doing, new complexities in the relationship arise. The main relationship between artistic contemplation and Christian commitment is an existential one, the decision of the Christian to appropriate for himself this learning about man and the world that happens to be peculiarly suited in both content and form to his concerns. But the relationship between them is not as clean-cut as this. It cannot be a pure one, constituted solely by the decision of the Christian to appropriate aesthetic learning, both because of the sort of man a Christian is and because of the power of the aesthetic mode. A Christian is a man whose commitment colors everything he does, including his reading of novels; and, on the other hand, the aesthetic mode has the power to influence men, whether or not they decide to be influenced by it. We will, then, have to investigate the inroads that both Christian commitment and the power of art make on the integrity of the principal relationship between them, the relationship by decision.

Christian commitment can undermine pure concentration on the immanent meanings of the aesthetic object. Without such concentration, the learning that the Christian decides to actualize in his life is not the wisdom that the novel offers

2. See Chapter 2, pp. 60-64.

him; it becomes merely an illustration, positive or negative, of his own convictions. As a man with basic convictions about the world and man, the Christian can undercut the purity of the aesthetic moment of intransitive attention, which is a *sine qua non* of the valid and actual relationship between a novel and a Christian. The Christian is a danger to the integrity of artistic insights, for in his attempt to "take every thought captive to obey Christ" (II Cor. 10:5), he can easily read his own Christian thoughts into and out of works of art. If he does so, not only is he an unfair reader or spectator, but he forfeits valuable learning that can come only through maintaining the separation between his convictions and the insights of the aesthetic object. Granted that a Christian as a man of basic convictions cannot jump out of his skin when he reads a novel; he can, however, make a conscious effort to read with a maximum of attention to the immanent meanings of the novel. If he does not, he alone is the loser. If he is to learn new things about the world and about man from a novel, then he must concentrate as intransitively as possible on it, for the full effect of a work of art comes only by way of itself, by way of every twist and turn in it. The purer the concentration on the intrinsic meanings of the aesthetic object, the more powerful will be the peculiar sort of effect that art can have on him—the effect of giving him new insight and not merely illustrations for insights he already has.

But the aesthetic mode itself makes, if anything, an even greater inroad on the integrity of the existential relationship between the novel and the Christian. Aesthetic contemplation endangers the existential relationship in at least two ways. Art influences us, whether or not we decide to be affected by it, and it entices us to remain in contemplation of its immanent insights, not to move toward actualization of its insights in our lives.

We are affected by the novels we read and the plays we see whether we will it or not, because works of the imagination touch us in our imaginations, a point perilously close to the motive springs of action. It is for this reason that Christian discrimination is concerned about the insidious effects of art, which can infiltrate a Christian's imagination with notions of the world and of man contrary to Christian belief.

I disagree with the ostrich-like head-burying of Christian discrimination; it is a stance that may preserve the Christian from doctrinal error, but only at the cost of limiting the realism, profundity, and breadth of his vision of the world and of men. However, it is true that men move by means of their imaginations, by the kinds of images they use to describe their feel of experience, more than by the concepts they use to explain experience. No one needs to be reminded of the power of Jesus' imagery of father and children, of Paul's imagery of slavery and sonship, or of John's imagery of the dark and the light. These images provide patterns for interpreting life, patterns that have a power over men's minds and hearts that conceptual language lacks. The same power can be ascribed to the images of castle and village in Kafka, of the white whale and the hideous beauty of the sea in Melville, of putrescent Venice and the sterile magic mountain in Mann. The imagination is not a plaything, and works of art are not harmless toys. We might recall a remark quoted earlier by T. S. Eliot:

The fiction that we read affects our behaviour towards our fellow-man, affects our patterns of ourselves. . . . The author of a work of imagination is trying to affect us wholly, as human beings, whether he knows it or not; and we are affected by it, as human beings, whether we intend to be or not.<sup>3</sup>

Neither a Christian nor anyone else can completely control the effect of his aesthetic experience. The degree of influence that art subconsciously has on us is a matter for psychologists to adjudicate, but the power that fairy-tale dragons and witches have on children seems ample evidence that it does affect the imagination at a basic level.

Finally, art tempts us to rest in its immanent meanings, to forego what Jenkins calls the "assimilation" of aesthetic discovery<sup>4</sup> and what we have called the actualization of the possible relationship between a novel and a Christian. Aesthetic knowing can be a danger to the Christian and can impede his decision to appropriate its learning for his discipleship, simply because it is knowledge and of a peculiarly

3. Eliot, "Religion and Literature," *The New Orpheus*, ed. Scott, pp. 227-28.

4. Jenkins, *Art and the Human Enterprise*, p. 178.

enticing sort. Knowledge for its own sake has a powerful allure; the harmony and pattern, what we call the beauty of aesthetic knowing, is a beguiling seducer. The Jewish people have always been especially perceptive of the dangers of intellectualism. Abraham Heschel makes the point in an essay on "Symbolism and Jewish Faith" that religion is not mainly thinking up symbols to express the reality of God, but living oneself as a symbol of the mercy and love of God. "We worship Him not by employing figures of speech but by shaping our actual lives according to His pattern."<sup>5</sup> Symbols are needed if man is to understand and know; as such, they are legitimate. But man's need is not the heart of religion.

Symbols have their place in the outer court of religion. What is found in the inner sanctuary is neither speculative nor artistic pageantry, but the simplicity and immediacy of insight, faith, and dedication.<sup>6</sup>

There is no denying the fact that the cognitive need, the drive for symbols, can be an aesthetic trap that eventuates in no ultimate commitment and no action.

The charge of intellectualism becomes even sharper when applied to aesthetic knowing. James Gustafson has written a biting portrait of "the vicarious moral man."

The aesthetic mode of vicarious moral existence seems to enjoy a particular fashionability in our generation. One can feel that he knows what moral suffering is by his study of Käthe Kollwitz prints, and even believe *he* has suffered. Or he can see himself as Holden Caulfield, or Willie Loman, and have a moral catharsis that has as lasting effects as a laxative. The relief is a delight, but the real problems are untouched. Indeed, the moral existence of the aesthetic vicarious moralist is something like the participation of the spectator in a football game: he has all the anxiety, all the despair, all the joy of victory, but none of the bruises and fatigue of the combat. . . . The vicarious moralist can be a "peeping-tom" in politics, in the racial struggle, in the struggles of family life, in every sphere of serious moral combat, and believe that he has fulfilled his responsibility in his fantasy. What makes his morality vicarious is not that he is informed by the arts, but that his new understanding leads to no decisive action.<sup>7</sup>

5. Abraham Joshua Heschel, "Symbolism and Jewish Faith," *Religious Symbolism*, ed. F. Ernest Johnson (New York, 1955), p. 67.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 68.

7. Gustafson, "Types of Moral Life," pp. 408-09.



The tendency to participate vicariously is caused not only by the weak will of the one who reads but also by the nature of art itself, its intention of drawing attention intransitively upon itself, of enticing one away from extrinsic concerns, of focusing interest on itself alone. This is the ground of its power both to affect us deeply with new insight and to entice us to rest permanently in contemplation of its new insights.

The relationship between literature and the Christian life, then, is not simply a matter of deciding to be influenced by the wisdom about man and the world offered by literature. We are influenced by it, and, on the other hand, our basic convictions influence our reception of it. But these qualifications upon the relationship between literature and the Christian life that is actualized through decision do not undercut its centrality. It is central because, in spite of the fact that we are influenced by what we do not will, we are most deeply affected by what we appropriate decisively and totally, by what we make our own, by what becomes for us, as Kierkegaard says, our "subjective truth." D. S. Savage suggests the kind of appropriation of aesthetic knowing that is necessary if art is to influence us in a decisive way.

Literature is scriptural in the sense that through it there is a communion between writer and reader in which the writer, searching for meaning in the chiaroscuro of private experience, communicates the resultant pattern to the reader, who may then make use of this pattern, appropriating it to himself, to discover some aspect of his own personal meaning. The responsibility is always with the reader, the individual, to appropriate that which is valuable and to reject that which is useless. And only that which he makes his own, drawing it into the very substance of his being, can be of any use to him. It may be said of truth in general that, however objectively true it may be, however I may genuflect before it, it is not truly truth until it becomes *my* truth, my intimate personal possession.<sup>8</sup>

We must make knowing a part of our doing, and this does not take place inevitably. In spite of the fact that aesthetic knowing is the sort of knowing that mediates toward doing, in that it is passionate, personal, felt acquaintance with the realities of the human situation, arousing the identification

8. D. S. Savage, *The Personal Principle: Studies in Modern Poetry* (London, 1944), p. 54.

and sympathy of the reader, nevertheless it focuses attention upon itself and not upon its relevance to extrinsic concerns. It is, then, perfectly possible to be emotionally and reflectively captured by the view of man's situation portrayed in a novel and yet do nothing about it. There is no necessary relationship between this kind of knowing and doing, between the moment of intransitive attention and the moment of its application to life, between the deepest experience of reality as felt and the decision to make this view part of one's own baggage for living. It is perfectly possible, and indeed it often seems to be the case, that we tend to preserve our most valued aesthetic experiences in their purity lest we sully them by integrating them into our daily behavioral life. So, even though aesthetic knowing is deeply passionate, subjective, and immediate, it does not lead in any necessary way to appropriation by a reader. It is possible to know in this way and still be a vicarious moralist, remaining in Kierkegaard's aesthetic stage.

What Kierkegaard saw better than perhaps anyone before or since was that knowing and doing, contemplation and commitment, thought and being are related only through an agent, only through the decision of the self to interiorize the truth. Whatever the truth or knowledge is that confronts a man, it will always have an extrinsic relationship to him until he makes it his own, until he becomes the truth. Kierkegaard was fighting against Hegel's necessary mediation between thought and being, between objective truth and subjective existence. Kierkegaard's insistence on subjective truth, as Hermann Diem points out, is not a rejection of the objectivity and historicity of the events behind Christian faith, but a corrective to the assumption that knowing about Christianity is the same as appropriating God's love in one's own existence.<sup>9</sup> Our concern, of course, is not with appropriating the truth of the Christian faith, but with appropriating the knowledge of man and the world offered in literature. Yet an analogy is possible with Kierkegaard's insights, for all knowledge is finally neutral. Between all knowledge and the inner appropriation of it, there is a hiatus, a pause, how-

9. Diem, *Kierkegaard's Dialectic*, pp. 89-101.

ever slight, that can be filled only by the decision of an agent.

Kierkegaard's point is not so much that a man choose rightly, but simply that he choose. He sometimes sounds anti-nomian and anti-intellectual in his fervor to free men from bondage to indecision, indecision that slowly but surely erodes the personality. To be a self is to choose. If one does not choose, if one deliberates and reflects on all the alternatives without coming to a choice among them, one never becomes a self, for personality dissipates itself in endless cogitation and possibility. Deliberation, no matter how sophisticated, never becomes choice except by a break with deliberation through a total commitment to one of the alternatives.

If you will understand me aright, I should like to say that in making a choice it is not so much a question of choosing the right as of the energy, the earnestness, the pathos with which one chooses. Thereby the personality announces its inner infinity, and thereby, in turn, the personality is consolidated. . . . My either/or does not in the first instance denote the choice between good and evil, it denotes the choice whereby one chooses good *and* evil or excludes them. Here the question is under what determinants one would contemplate the whole of existence and would himself live. That the man who chooses good and evil chooses the good is indeed true, but this becomes evident only afterwards; for the aesthetical is not the evil but neutrality and that is the reason why I affirmed that it is the ethical that constitutes the choice. It is, therefore, not so much a question of choosing between willing the good *or* the evil, as of choosing to *will*.<sup>10</sup>

The distinction between knowing and doing, reflection and action, is an absolute one, as Kierkegaard's Judge William forcefully points out in this passage. No amount of deliberation, regardless of its subtlety, leads by a natural and painless path to personal appropriation and action. Commitment is a different sort of thing from contemplation. This Kierkegaard saw very clearly, and he would permit no evasive action to blur the distinction. In spite of the fact that, as we have seen, the learning that literary works offer us is in many ways suitable to the kind of doing that is at the heart of the Christian faith, nevertheless, they are, in Kierkegaard's cate-

10. Søren Kierkegaard, "Either/Or: A Fragment of Life," *Kierkegaard Anthology*, ed. Bretall, pp. 106, 107.

gories, worlds apart. The only link between these worlds is an agent, a person who in the first instance chooses to choose and then chooses to choose something.

To choose something, to choose to incorporate wisdom about man and the world in literature into our lives, does not, of course, mean that the nature of that learning undergoes a transformation. To appropriate the learning that art offers in a personal, subjective way, so that it is drawn into our doing, into our attitudes and responses, does not mean that the learning is transmuted into programs of action or philosophies of life. The knowledge of man and the world found in novels takes the form of concrete stories, felt acquaintance with the subtleties of character and situation. Its influence remains commensurate with its form, so that while the relationship depends on a decision to implement the learning, what is actualized is more of an attitude or an awakened sensibility than it is a program or policy. As Gustafson points out, the new understanding gained from the arts must lead to decisive action,<sup>11</sup> but the decision to act on the basis of the new insight does not mean that the nature of the learning itself is decisive. Indeed, the distinctive quality of the learning we gain from literature is its indecisiveness, its openness to the complexity and indeterminacy of man and the world. What we decide is to move from the aesthetic stage of contemplation to the ethical stage of commitment and action, but the nature of the influence to which we have opened our lives, as well as our emotions and thoughts, has already been decided for us—it is the education of our sensibility in the infinite caverns of the spirit of man and the labyrinthine passageways of life in the world.

### *SOME COMMENTS ON THE IMAGE OF MAN*

We have up to this juncture been concerned chiefly with how literature, in its own integrity, can be of service to Christianity. Literature is relevant to the Christian in helping to educate his sensibility in the richness of human

11. Gustafson, "Types of Moral Life," pp. 408-09.

life, and the way a Christian appropriates such learning is through decision. This has been my thesis. We will now ask how the Christian faith might do a service for literature, though, as we shall see, there will be mutual benefit to both Christianity and literature. What follows is not a systematic statement of a philosophy of man or a conclusion to my thesis; it is only an addendum and it is properly expressed in hints and suggestions. However, I believe it is legitimate as an addendum, for the following comments about the image of man have been implied throughout the entire essay.

My comments are concerned with the image of man and of human life in our contemporary theology and literature. It is perhaps *the* problem of our time, for a viable image of the significance of temporal life constitutes the basic health of any society. Once upon a time, of course, Christianity provided the basis for such an image, an understanding of human life that saw it as inexorably temporal and yet shot through with transcendent significance. As Auerbach so brilliantly points out, the Western literary tradition reflected this image through its willingness to use the high style for the depiction of the mundane realities of human life, a willingness inspired originally by the humiliated earthly life of Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup> The Christian faith has always encouraged the density and reality of finite, human life; Christianity itself has been, as the champions of secularity remind us, the prime mover in the trend toward secularity and away from religiosity.<sup>2</sup> There is no other religion that is less religious than Christianity, no other religion—because there is no other truly incarnational religion—that places such a premium on the importance and the dignity of human life.

It is, perhaps, curious then that many poets and artists appear to be disenchanted with the Christian image of man. And their disenchantment seems even more curious for it appears to derive from what they feel is a basic otherworldliness in Christianity. They seem to find Christianity alien to their concern as artists with the temporal, natural, mundane

1. Auerbach, *Mimesis*, p. 41.

2. See, for instance, Harvey Cox, *The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective* (New York, Macmillan Co., 1965), pp. 17-36.



reality of man. R. W. B. Lewis, in *The Picaresque Saint*, says that the only fragment of Christianity perceptible to Camus and to most others of his general persuasion is "an unmodulated otherworldliness," a "doctrinaire antagonism to the natural and human."<sup>3</sup> In a symposium called "Religion and the Intellectuals," published in the *Partisan Review*, a more or less unanimous condemnation emerges of religion in general and of Christianity in particular for its irrelevance to man's natural and historical life. Isaac Rosenfeld's comments are typical of the extreme wing.

The reason I cannot accept any of the current religious philosophies is that they are all crazy in one basic respect—their denial of nature and attempt to push man out of nature. It may be that I have not read enough theology to find the exception. But the theologians I have read—Kierkegaard, Berdyaev, Niebuhr, Maritain—all agree in claiming man's true nature, his essential being, his humanity, his freedom or whatever else they choose to call it, to be outside historical time and the world of nature. . . . Moreover, as there cannot be revealed religion without the supernatural, all such religions must regard man's occupancy of nature as something of a comedown or at best a temporary condition, as though he were only slumming in this world. I call this crazy. This longing to clear out is not represented metaphorically as an extension, say, of the desire to find a new apartment or visit foreign countries, but literally—as though there really were someplace else to go. One might as well say of fish that their real life lies in a realm outside water.<sup>4</sup>

This criticism, though somewhat naïve and indiscriminating, points to a misconception that Christians have always had to deal with—the notion that because they hope for a better life to come they have no hope for the present one. However, as we shall see, it is precisely because that other life is here with man now that his temporal, historical life gains a significance unattainable on its own.

But how has it come about that Christianity, which alone among the world's religions has its feet planted squarely on the earth (and in the mire) in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, is now seen by many as the enemy of human life? We cannot here follow the history that has led to this state of affairs, but one result, equally in literature as in theology, seems fairly

3. Lewis, *Picaresque Saint*, pp. 78–79.

4. "Religion and the Intellectuals," p. 244.

evident—the oscillation between concentration on human life and a retreat from it. Novelists are no more convinced than theologians these days of the significance of temporal existence. Neither is entirely sure, as William Lynch puts it, that human life gets “anywhere.” Both novelists and theologians claim allegiance to the density of human existence, but the lusty, unselfconscious affirmation of human life that a Dante was capable of is no longer possible. The affirmations of man that do come through our novels and theologies are faint reflections of this past glory.

This state of affairs, of course, may have to be accepted with resigned equanimity. If the vision of human life has deteriorated beyond even the help of major surgery, we ought, perhaps, to hear the terminal report as gracefully as possible. No one can effect a reversal if the disease is fatal. But a more modest proposal may suggest that the diagnosis has overlooked some data; another opinion may reveal some hope. My comments will attempt only to suggest that there is some hope—for the various modes of retreat by theologians and novelists from man’s temporal existence are false to the innermost wisdom of both the Christian faith and great literature. That is to say, neither the Christian faith nor great literature ever has retreated from historical existence and, I would add, ever could retreat and survive. The heart of each concerning man is the affirmation of his significance as a self who makes decisions of a thoroughly mundane nature that are nevertheless fraught with life and death significance. This pattern of human life, a pattern that is thoroughly temporal and historical (even when open to divine influence), is a common property of the Christian faith and of great literature.

We shall try to see first why and how this pattern has been lost in our time to both novelists and theologians, and then how it might be recalled. I say recalled, for the assumption throughout these comments is that this pattern is not a program to be adopted, but an analysis of the way things really are.

The most popular ways of retreat from historical, temporal life for contemporary novelists are either to escape into the inner life of man or to fight the absurd situation with a combination of endurance, guts, and native wit. Saul

Bellow's *Herzog* and Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* are first-rate examples of these tendencies. *Herzog* is a traditional novel in that it is concerned with the odyssey of a man's soul, with the unraveling of his destiny, or how he got the way he is.<sup>5</sup> Like David Copperfield or Ivan Karamazov, Herzog is a man in the process of maturing. But the public, linear movement so obvious in the older novels is replaced in *Herzog* by an internal, circular movement. The technique conveys that Herzog never gets anywhere. Here, as in Joyce's *Ulysses* and Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, the comment on human life is carried by the lack of plot, the interruption of temporal sequence, the back-flashes, the stream of consciousness. Human life is just one damn thing after another. To be sure, life is at times amusing, at times pathetic, and in the midst of it a man can even be kind and mildly courageous as Herzog is. But it is always the same old thing, because real life is not what happens to one, but in one, and the internal machine pours every rag and tatter of public history into the same old dies that turn out the same old guilts, fantasies, and grudges. Such internal history is programmed and it always comes out in certain set patterns. Even though Herzog is not sadistic, masochistic, perverted, addicted, or depraved (as are the "heroes" of numerous other contemporary novels), he is surely a comedown from that animal whom our forefathers described as half angel, half beast. Herzog scarcely qualifies for either epithet, and he seems innocuous and emasculated indeed when he is placed beside Dante's Farinata degli Uberti who, chest-deep in fire, retains his majestic stature in spite of the punishment for his temporal decisions.

Already were my eyes drawn to his mien  
While he stood, chest out-thrust and haughty-browed  
As if all Hell he held in vast contempt.<sup>6</sup>

Farinata lived his life in an atmosphere where human life and decisions mattered so much that eternal damnation was the prospect for a false life. Hell, far from being a negative

5. Saul Bellow, *Herzog* (New York, 1964).

6. Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, x, 33-35, quoted from the translation of Thomas G. Bergin (New York, Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1955), pp. 32-33.

concept, was a witness to the importance of human life. It is difficult to imagine Herzog being damned to the nether regions, for he was not, after all, that wicked. His real life was not what he did or what was done to him, but what he thought about what he did and suffered—and thought can redeem us all. By his retreat to the interior, Herzog loses his guilt, but also his humanity.

Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*, like *Herzog*, attempts to salvage the few scraps of man still left. But the method is very different; while Herzog tries to hold himself together by thought, Yossarian tries to do it by cunning. In fact, thought is entirely useless in the world of *Catch-22*, for as one character notes, "immoral logic seemed to be confounding him at every turn."<sup>7</sup> Heller goes one step beyond Melville and Camus who used rational means to body forth an irrational situation; in Heller's book, the absurd situation is mirrored in irrational logic. The connections and expectations of ordinary language do not hold for Yossarian and his fellow pilots fighting in the Italian theater during the Second World War, because in war one thing does not lead to another in any rational fashion; life does not get anywhere, except to death. Talk, the attempt to make sense out of this situation, is senseless—characters merely repeat what another has said, or contradict it, or mumble a non sequitur, or engage in lengthy conversations that never mesh.

There was only one catch and that was *Catch-22*, which specified that a concern for one's own safety in the face of dangers that were real and immediate was the process of a rational mind. Orr was crazy and could be grounded. All he had to do was ask; and as soon as he did, he would no longer be crazy and would have to fly more missions. Orr would be crazy to fly more missions and sane if he didn't, but if he was sane he had to fly them. If he flew them he was crazy and didn't have to; but if he didn't want to he was sane and had to. Yossarian was moved very deeply by the absolute simplicity of this clause of *Catch-22* and let out a respectful whistle.<sup>8</sup>

The logic of this passage is the logic of death, a logic that drives home its arbitrariness by a parody of rationality. Everyday life—life in war—is run by an officialdom in league with

7. Joseph Heller, *Catch-22* (New York, 1961), p. 397.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

death, and the only way to deal with it is not to move with it, but to escape from it. One must leap out of it and into life, which takes every shred of cunning, perseverance, and guts a man can call up. As Yossarian sets out to desert, to escape the death-machine, the chaplain says to him:

"I mean it, Yossarian. You'll have to keep on your toes every minute of every day. They'll bend heaven and earth to catch you."

"I'll keep on my toes every minute."

"You'll have to jump."

"Jump!" Major Danby cried.

Yossarian jumped. Nately's whore was hiding just outside the door. The knife came down, missing him by inches, and he took off.<sup>9</sup>

There is no way from everyday, temporal life to meaning here; there is no movement within history that can eventuate in significance; there is no development, no linear maturation, no pattern of responsible decisions and effort culminating in insight and hope. Yossarian's world is mad and the only path to sanity is to defy the arbitrary logic of this world through a complete separation from it. One of Yossarian's officers says to him, "You'll always be alone. No one will ever be on your side, and you'll always live in danger of betrayal."<sup>10</sup> Yossarian's action looks like escapism to those within the death-dealing system, but within the framework of the book it is a step into life, but a life without any personal or historical continuities for it can be maintained only by constant flight. Yossarian must be ready to "jump" at every moment to escape the knife.

If this is the way human life is, if it is indeed fast in the hand of death, then a man can salvage himself only through escaping from it. The image of man that emerges is the cunning fighter who holds onto his body and soul (as well as his compassion for his fellows) by using all his wits to evade the tentacles of death. Of course he will lose in the end, but at least he will go down fighting.

Turning to theology, we see other sorts of retreat from historical existence. By and large, contemporary theology escapes either into transcendence (anthropology is really

9. *Ibid.*, p. 463.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 460-61.



Christology) or into immanence (theology is really anthropology). An example of the first tendency is Karl Barth, the giant of contemporary theology. At first glance he seems a curious witness, for it is possible to view his entire *Church Dogmatics* as a project to establish the true humanity of man. The humanity of man is established by and with the revelation of true humanity in Jesus Christ. Every man is a man to the extent that he lives from and toward the one true man. But the effort Barth must expend to establish human life as meaningful witnesses to the straits into which our image of man has fallen. Moreover, the way in which he attempts to establish man's humanity, to derive an anthropology of true humanity entirely from Christology, suggests that, if man were to relax his grip on Christ for one moment, he would fall into the dream of nonbeing. There is no in-between, no ongoing historical, natural life of man (at least none that is worth the attention of a theologian), but either life in Christ or "lost" time.

It is a tricky business to criticize Barth on this point, because he does speak extensively of temporality, history, and concrete existence when talking about man. But Barth gives these terms a special theological meaning, and the relation between this meaning and that of ordinary usage is not at all clear. By "temporality" Barth means time under God, which alone is real time; by "history" he means the history of God with man, which is the only true history; and by "concreteness" he means the concrete reality of Jesus Christ and the concrete response of men to him. In other words, from the standpoint of faith and theology, the real, true, or actual is that which pertains to the history of God with man, and all else can at best have only a phenomenal reality.<sup>11</sup> Barth's is a different sort of otherworldliness from traditional two-world thinking. The dualism is between two histories in one world, the history of God with man and that lost history of the men who have rejected God's election or are indifferent to it. The only real human history is soteriological history.

The lack of historical density in Barth's view of man is

11. Statements to this effect occur throughout the *Dogmatics*, but III/2, par. 47 is particularly relevant. Here his typical method of deriving anthropology from Christology is continually employed.

evident in his treatment of *the* man, Jesus Christ. The historical biblical picture of the man Jesus occupies only a scant thirty pages in Barth's tomes, in comparison to the thousands of pages devoted to Jesus Christ as the judge, the redeemer, the elected, the rejected, the crucified, the resurrected. Granted that there is no split between soteriological and personal history in the life of the man Jesus; nevertheless, the story of his life, death, and resurrection as Barth tells it lacks the complexity and density of true historical life. It reads like a shadow play; Jesus, the man, enacts in Galilee and finally in Jerusalem what was decided before in the secret counsels of God.

The figure that dominates this entire section does not provide an image of man that would be an adequate model for integrating once again the human and the transcendent. Like the views of Christ that Barth condemns, his own is cryptically Docetic. In a word, it lacks guts. It does not have the one quality that William Lynch sees as a dominant characteristic of the biblical picture of Christ—his willingness to take on the entire burden of time, to become so immersed in the ordinary historical life of man that even he had no way out except through the death that all men face. Barth's Jesus seems always to be that shadowy figure on the Emmaus road, his back toward us, his face toward the Father whose will he obeys completely and without struggle. The transcendent dimension swallows up the human subtly but surely.

As a consequence of this uncertainty about the real humanity of Jesus (and by real I mean the man Jesus as an agent, with all the temptations, waywardness, and perplexity that a conscious will in an intelligent being involves), there is also uncertainty over our own humanity. We are human only transcendentally, or soteriologically, only insofar as we derive our being from and are united in faith to Jesus Christ. Real humanity for Barth means saved humanity. It does not have anything to do with man's ordinary social, personal, ethical existence except, of course, to the extent that this phenomenal existence is brought into line with real existence.

Now, granted that Barth is no fool—he knows men live ordinary lives bordered by birth and death and fraught in between with all the messiness of personal and political

decisions and responsibilities—and granted that theology is concerned particularly with the relation between God and men (and not with everything else), nevertheless, the image of man that Christian theology ought to present to the world is one that is commensurate with, and indeed the basis for, this other, general life. Christian theology ought to because such an image is biblical. It is the image intrinsic to the story of the man Jesus; it is the image implied in various stories of the Old Testament concerning the relations of men with God; it is the image that is basic to the health of the Christian faith and the health of every culture to which it speaks. Barth's image of man derived from his Christology does not make us happy to be men anymore than does Bellow's image in *Herzog* or Heller's in *Catch-22*, and it is one of the peculiar glories of Christianity that it calls men to clap their hands over being the particular living creatures they are.

An outburst of enthusiasm for historical human life perhaps appears naïve if not positively obscene in the light of Auschwitz and hydrogen bombs, not to mention the hypocrisies and petty cruelties that stow away in each man's soul. But I am not extolling natural man (if there be such a creature) or asserting the basic goodness of man in spite of minor lapses like racism or wholesale slaughter. Rather, I am insisting that the heart of the Christian faith and the oldest ploy in preaching to the cultured among the despisers is simply that God loved and loves man, not redeemed man or Christian man or first-century man or medieval man or religious man, but today's man in all his secularity, his indifference to things religious, his introspectiveness, his sophistication. He loves this man in his particular historical life, however the sociologists, political theorists, and psychiatrists might describe it. It is not some other history (biblical, soteriological, or what all) that man must take on, but it is his own history that must be opened up and redeemed.

The danger, of course, in insisting on man's own history is precisely that he can all too easily be left with only that. If Barth errs in the direction of taking the stuffing out of historical life by turning anthropology into Christology, then Protestants from the Enlightenment on have erred in the direction of diminishing the reality of God by turning the-

ology into anthropology. If, as Auerbach and Heller have illustrated from Western literature, trust in the reality of human life depends on a sense of the thickness of transcendence, then these are concomitant problems. We cannot have a living man without a living God; but in many circles, God seems to be in more trouble these days than man. The insistence on the value of secularity in our time is scarcely a novel one, for Feuerbach had already gone farther than the current Christian secularists are willing to go. These men insist that what is most real is man and his life (his world-views, values, needs), while a traditionalist like Barth insists that what is most real is God and his life (his decisions, acts, promises). The old adage about heresy seems pertinent here, for both Barth and the secularists are right in what they affirm and wrong in what they deny or at least subtly undercut. Barth affirms the solidity and tangibility of God; the secularists insist on the density of human life; but neither presents a viable image or model for the integration of the transcendent and the human. Barth's man is religious man with the rest of his existence cast aside as phenomena; Paul Tillich's man is secular man with the transcendent dimension in effect relegated to the depth of his secular life. But the two realms are in neither case integrated. To suggest an image of human life that *in and through its own* density manifests the density and tangibility of God is the task of our times.

The secularist "heresy" appears to be more widespread in our day than the religious one. It is scarcely fair to set John A. T. Robinson's little homily, *Honest to God*, against Barth's majestic *Dogmatics*, but with Tillich cheering in the stands, Robinson may have a fighting chance. For Robinson's book is interesting mainly because it illustrates what happens to Tillich's crypto-panteism and depth psychology in the hands of popularizers. Robinson intends to retain transcendence (he separates himself from Feuerbach) by denying the subject but keeping the attributes. That is to say, transcendence need not be interpreted theistically as the highest being, but can and ought to mean the dimension of depth in all reality. To say that God is personal is not to speak of a person, but to believe that reality at its deepest level is personal.

Theological statements are not a description of "the highest Being" but an analysis of the depths of personal relationships—or, rather, an analysis of the depths of *all* experience "interpreted by love."<sup>12</sup>

Robinson distinguishes his position from immanence by insisting that, while theological statements are statements about human existence, they are about the depth of that existence. Here it becomes evident how shadowy and insubstantial transcendence has become for the secular Protestant, for it (the personal pronoun hardly seems appropriate) is only the depth of what we feel and know. The implication is inevitable that the deeper you feel—here is the dependency on depth psychology—the greater your God will be. There is a premium placed on deep, personal, I-Thou relationships as the key to this gnosis, for gnosis it is in spite of the lip service to Jesus Christ—even he tells us for sure only what we intuit in these relations, namely, that love is the power of the universe. Nothing is said about—and how would one preach to?—those millions whose personal relations could teach them nothing about the ultimate ground of being except its cruelty, perversity, and indifference. One has the feeling that parish retreats where lonely, middle-aged, middle-class people find some acceptance lay behind Robinson's treatment of divine love. Unlike the biblical view, it lacks bite and definiteness.

It is perhaps the lack of bite and definiteness that is the greatest theological sin that Robinson commits. The contrast with Barth's view of God illustrates how far Robinson has strayed, for perhaps the two outstanding attributes of God in Barth's view are the seriousness with which he takes man and the definiteness of his being and acts. Robinson forfeits divine substance and with it human substance. His God is finally interior to man, not "out there," a notion that he vehemently condemns, and not "with" and "for" man, a perspective that he completely ignores, but "in" him, in his deepest (and most noble) emotions and thoughts. But the image of man reflects, as it always does, the image of God; a flabby, shadowy God who basks in a pool of love has as his counterpart a sentimental lover. There is nothing in either of these

12. John A. T. Robinson, *Honest to God* (Philadelphia, 1963), p. 49.



images that is tough-minded or definite. There is no talk about law, guilt, judgment, decision, promise, time, or responsibility.

It is but one step from a God who is a person only in that he is the depth of human personal relations to one who is not a person at all. If a man does not intuit that depth in his relations with others, he is left without a God. And that is, of course, precisely what has happened to a number of younger Protestant theologians for whom "God-language" is no longer relevant to contemporary life.<sup>13</sup>

It used to be possible to say: we cannot know God but He has made himself known to us, and at that point analogues from the world of personal relations would enter the scene and help us out. But somehow, the situation has deteriorated; as before, we cannot know, but now it seems that He does not make himself known, even as enemy. This is more than the old protest against natural theology or metaphysics; more than the usual assurance that before the holy God all our language gets broken and diffracted into paradox. It is really that we do not know, do not adore, do not possess, do not believe in God. It is not just that a capacity has dried up within us; we do not take all this as merely a statement about our frail psyches, we take it as a statement about the nature of the world and we try to convince others. God is dead. We are not talking about the absence of the experience of God, but about the experience of the absence of God.<sup>14</sup>

The two main tenets of these young theologians are the death or unreality of God for modern man and the affirmation of secular life as the source of spiritual and ethical norms. True Christianity is the affirmation of the secular world in the style of the man Jesus. It is, in other words, a rejection of God and an acceptance of the world. While the atheistic theology is not yet a significant, substantial contribution, it is a resurgence of the attempt made by Nietzsche simultaneously to reject God and to affirm the world. It is another witness to the extraordinary difficulty that modern man has in seeing God and man, the transcendent and the temporal, together.

One reason that it is so difficult to see them together is that the theological models have been faulty. Tillich and Robin-

13. Three of the principal so-called atheistic theologians are Thomas J. J. Altizer, William H. Hamilton, and Paul Van Buren.

14. William Hamilton, "The Death of God Theology," *Christian Scholar*, 48 (1965), 31.

son operate with an understanding of the relation of the finite and the infinite that is similar in some respects to traditional nature sacramentalism. This model claims that the divine shines through this world and one intuitively it or breaks through to it in ecstatic moments. The Christology most congenial to this pattern is a Word-flesh scheme: the Word took flesh, was incarnated, assumed a human body. It is the orthodox Christology and worked reasonably well when men could still see the hand of God in nature. It is also a static, spatial pattern, a pattern in which one sees the contact of the finite and the transcendent in a moment (the affinities with mysticism are obvious). The spatial, static, visual quality of this model is reflected in Tillich's preference for painting above other art forms. It was, in fact, while he was contemplating a painting that he first came upon his notion of symbols and their depth as the basic model for relations between the finite and the transcendent.<sup>15</sup>

The Tillich-Robinson model deviates from the traditional pattern in at least two respects. Tillich and Robinson do not use the orthodox Christology, but a variation of the Antiochene pattern—Jesus becomes the Christ through self-emptying. Their Christology, however, also functions as a basis for sacramentalism—the finite negates itself so that the infinite may be revealed. But—and here is the other point of difference—for Tillich and Robinson the finite symbols are opaque. Gerard Manley Hopkins saw the world charged with the glory of God; Tillich indeed sees it as charged, but there the connection breaks down. Contemporary paintings, as representations of the world, do not ring out the good news of the personal creator, but at the most point to “ultimacy” through their broken forms.<sup>16</sup>

The sacramental model is a glorious one; it lies at the heart of Dante's poetry and is neat, final, and satisfying. But it does not work anymore because man does not see himself primarily in fleshly terms on a continuum with nature, and he does not see his world in static, spatial terms. He, like Tillich, cannot shout with Gerard Manley Hopkins that the world is charged with the grandeur of God, for he has

15. Tillich, *Interpretation of History*, pp. 15–16.

16. Tillich, “Existentialist Aspects of Modern Art,” pp. 136–47.

"come of age." He sees himself as a self, an agent, who must take charge of things himself (even though he fails), who develops temporally, who moves toward insight (if he attains it at all) only through hard work and agony. This is certainly the root image of human life in *Herzog* and *Catch-22*, in spite of the fact that the results of man's efforts are dismal, if not pathetic. And it is the image of man in most other good novels, as we have seen.

It is also the biblical image of human life, in spite of the boost given to the sacramental model over the centuries by orthodox Christology. Karl Barth, like others before him, saw the error of traditional Christology and rejected the Word-flesh pattern for the God-man one. Barth attempts to take seriously the historical selfhood of Jesus by his insistence that the activity of Jesus is his being; his being is not the Logos incarnate, but his total life of forgiving love culminating in the cross and resurrection. But in spite of his fine understanding of the unity of the person and work of Jesus Christ, he seems to end where the Church has usually ended in regard to the agency of the man Jesus. For Barth divides the actual activity of Jesus Christ, even though he insists that he does not intend to do so. He starts with the primary activity, the obedience of the Son of God, and the secondary activity, the conformation of the Son of man to the activity of the Son of God, reads, it seems to me, like shadow play.

But Barth points in the right direction even though he shortchanges the historical selfhood of the man Jesus. It is noteworthy that, in contrast to Tillich's preference for painting, Barth's favorite art form is music—the least concerned with representation, the most temporal and dynamic of the arts. And perhaps there is a clue here for our understanding of human life. What I am about to suggest is neither novel nor revolutionary; it has been suggested before and will be again as long as the Christian faith lives. It is the suggestion that the biblical image of human life is a dynamic, temporal one that sees man as first of all an agent, a self, who becomes what he is only through a slow process of maturation. It is the further suggestion that the form that divine-human relations take in the Bible is both centered on this agency and commensurate with its nature. In other words, it is an under-

standing of human life that perceives the presence of God in and through the density of temporal decisions.

A qualification must be added at the outset. It is, of course, audacious to speak of *the* biblical image of human life, and it is one-sided to speak of that image as concerned principally with temporality, for the eschatology of the New Testament demands that any Christian view of man speak not only of the present permeation of life by the victorious love of God, but also of the future fulfillment of temporal life. The Christian view of human life is not the same as secular views, any secular view. Nevertheless, it is also true—and this is the main point that I am trying to make here, bracketing other questions—that the Christian faith offers support to and indeed suggests a form for human life as a thoroughly (though not necessarily exclusively) temporal affair. Christianity offers a pattern for human life that would warm the heart of the most ardent secularist, although this is not the whole story, at least for the Christian. Such a pattern, however, may be a contribution that the Christian faith can and ought to make to secular culture, though at the same time Christians must remind themselves and others that the pattern offered is a truncated one and that it brackets certain crucial questions about man's present as well as about his future.

With this qualification of the model in mind, let us turn to two examples of it—the story of David and the Gospel accounts of Jesus. The selection of David, specifically the so-called Succession Document (II Sam. 9–20; I Kings 1, 2), is admittedly a biased one, for it is in many ways atypical of the Old Testament understanding of the relation of divine activity to human affairs. As Gerhard von Rad points out, the view of history suggested here marks the change to a new concept of God's action within it.

For the old narrators Jahweh's control of history was principally seen in miracles, in the *charisma* of a leader, in catastrophes, or other signal manifestations of his power: above all it was tied to sacral institutions (the holy war, the Ark, etc.). But now the whole thing was completely changed. Nowhere is there a miracle, and nowhere in the events a sacral point, something like a sacred middle-point, from which the great historical impulses issue. The

causal chain of human events is closed without a break—nowhere does the narrator keep a place open where the divine action can interact with the earthly history. And we should look in vain here for a sacred core to which the turbulent events are explicitly or implicitly related. The sphere in which this history moves is completely secular, and the forces in play derive solely from men who are far from allowing themselves to be directed by special religious influences. But the reason why the historian no longer had need of all the traditional means of portrayal (miracles, etc.) was that his concept of the nature of the divine guidance of history was completely different. Jahweh's control takes in all that happens. It does not let itself be seen intermittently in holy miracles; it is as good as hidden from the natural eye: but it continuously permeates all departments of life, public and private, religious and secular alike. The special field where this control of history operates is the human heart, whose impulses and resolves Jahweh in sovereign fashion makes subservient to his plan for history.<sup>17</sup>

The point, of course, is not whether this view of human life is typical of the Old Testament, but whether it is continuous with the understanding of man in relation to a personal, active God that runs throughout the Bible. And it certainly appears to be. There is never any suggestion in the text or elsewhere that the God who has usually been seen as the open and active force in public history and natural catastrophes is other than the one who operates here secretly and entirely within the framework of mundane, secular life. Nor is there any suggestion that the man who in other stories of the Old Testament has been openly chastised for disobedience or rewarded for faithfulness is different from the self-willed, backsliding David who moves and acts and thinks as an independent agent in control of his situation. In other words, what this story so eminently illustrates is that miracles are not essential either to the power of God or to the openness of man to God's control. On the contrary, the full agency of both God and man working together is most thoroughly evident not in God's thunderclaps and man's response of awe or delight, but in God's secret (though fullsome) operation in and through the rich, complex, mundane decisions of man's thoroughly secular life.

17. Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. D. M. G. Stalker, 1 (London, 1962), 315-16.



The story starts with God's guarantee of the throne to David (II Sam. 7), although even the promise has a barb in it, for the anointed one is always to be "son" to God as "father."

I will be his father, and he shall be my son. When he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men; but I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever. (II Sam. 7:14-16).

The promise is by no means realized by a straight line of ascent; in fact, the story of David's ascension is so full of scandals, human frailties, and political intrigues that the theme often gets buried beneath the squalor and complexity of the tale. Little divine activity appears to be present.

David initially gets entangled in secular political quarrels which reveal no trace of any pressing towards the goal of this office. Indeed, even the choice of David as king, first over Judah (II Sam. 2:4) and then over Israel (II Sam. 5:3), was due, as the accounts make clear, to human initiative, namely that of the "men of Judah" and later on that of all the "elders of Israel."<sup>18</sup>

The tenuousness of the fulfillment of the promise is everywhere evident in this taut narrative, for it is not at all clear that it will be fulfilled—the sons fall away, Amnon to licentiousness and Absalom to covetousness—and only the late-born Solomon (who is pushed to accession not by the hand of God, but by the hands of Nathan and Bathsheba) forestalls the rise to power by a descendant of Saul. The way from promise to fulfillment goes through the intricacies of character, particularly David's—his genius for political maneuvering, his passionate nature which eventuates in a murder, his generosity and compassion, his ambition and his despair over his fading glory, his extraordinary love for his sons. In this story God operates with David and that means in complete commensurability with his selfhood, his personality and passions. Whatever the content of divine activity may be, it is entirely schooled to the discipline set by the realities of the human situation.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 309.

There is no *deus ex machina* in this entire story, only the events occurring through the clash and conflict of men's wills and emotions. God's relation to this history is well illustrated in the negative by the fact that the author speaks of God explicitly only three times, and in each case it is a comment on God's attitude toward a man's action or an intervention to influence that action through swaying men's emotions (II Sam. 11:27; 12:24; 17:14). In other words, the intervention is entirely within the context of the human actions and emotions that dominate the story.

What, then, is the role of divine activity in this history that appears to be all surface, entirely secular and intramural? The specific mode of God's operation is brilliantly summarized by von Rad.

It is no blind play of chance that the writer is depicting, but the fulfilment of destinies in the strict sense of the word. Sin and suffering pass before the beholder's eyes in quick succession. Any sort of illusion, any temptation coming from the side of honours or other satisfactions involves these men in guilt in which they are engulfed. So it was with Ammon [sic], with Absalom, with Adonijah, with Achitophel, and with Sheba. And above all else towers the guilt of the King, especially his guilt towards Uriah and his weakness with his sons. Nathan had said that David would experience publicly "before all Israel and in face of the sun" (II Sam. 12:11), the thing he had done to Uriah in secret. Some time later, as a political action, Absalom openly and designedly takes possession of his royal father's harem (II Sam. 16:22). Here the idea of a nemesis, which dominates the whole presentation of this history, reaches its culmination in the word of a prophet. God himself acts upon the sinner through the *jus talionis*, which operates in history in secret. Even the theologian would do well for a start to bow before the sombre splendour of this mundane picture of the history. It positively has a surface which depicts men who appear to be abandoned to themselves and to the baleful sphere of guilt and suffering, of which they themselves were the occasion.<sup>19</sup>

The last sentence clinches the modernity of the picture. Many contemporary novelists and "new" theologians could agree to this image of man, and yet it is within and through this thoroughly mundane and even "lost" situation that God operates to bring his will to pass. He brings it to pass somehow or other through the wills of men. I believe the "some-

19. Ibid., p. 314.

how or other" is a necessary cavil, for the analyses of how agency is apportioned have usually proved fatal to the full agency of one or the other parties. The point is not how this happens, but rather that in the actual lives of men and nations it does happen. It does not happen, of course, in a way for all to see, for the operation is in secret, but every other significant human development—like love or maturity or creativity or commitment—is also in secret. Whatever happens in personal life through difficult, mundane decisions is always cloaked in a mystery that is impenetrable to objective analysis and clear categories. However, that is not to say that it is beyond human comprehension or expression. Our great novels are concerned with the same mystery of personal development, but they are not struck dumb by it. In fact, novels are by and large our best source for understanding the notion of the development of selfhood in relation to other powers distinct from, yet influencing, the self. Whether one thinks of Anna Karenin, Thomas Sutpen, or Raskolnikov, one is reminded of the same mystery of personal agency influenced, though by no means completely dominated, by the powers—social, political, cosmic—that set the context for it. The difference of the biblical view from that of our great novelists is not in form, but in content. The Old Testament view strongly suggests and the New Testament view confirms that the power that operates in human affairs is oriented toward the fulfillment of temporal selves and human history.

In other words, the biblical view of divine control of human affairs is in terms of God's choice and formation of certain individuals. Auerbach touches on the heart of the matter in the course of comparing Homeric and Old Testament heroes.

Each of the great figures of the Old Testament, from Adam to the prophets, embodies a moment of [the] vertical connection. God chose and formed these men to the end of embodying his essence and will—yet choice and formation do not coincide, for the latter proceeds gradually, historically, during the earthly life of him upon whom the choice has fallen. . . . Fraught with their development, sometimes even aged to the verge of dissolution, they show a distinct stamp of individuality entirely foreign to the Homeric heroes. Time can touch the latter only outwardly, and even that change is brought to our observation as little as possible; whereas

the stern hand of God is ever upon the Old Testament figures; he has not only made them once and for all and chosen them, but he continues to work upon them, bends them and kneads them, and, without destroying them in essence, produces from them forms which their youth gave no grounds for anticipating. . . . And how much wider is the pendulum swing of their lives than that of the Homeric heroes! For they are fallible, subject to misfortune and in their humiliation their acts and words reveal the transcendent majesty of God.<sup>20</sup>

Men, not natural or even historical events, are the bearers and revealers of the divine will. A man's individuality and his unique destiny are not undermined by divine control, but are in fact established by it, according to Auerbach. For it is precisely those men whose lives were most deeply invaded by God who become the most fully differentiated into full individuality, whereas the Homeric heroes who know no such control are by comparison less distinct and developed individuals. In the biblical stories transcendence is immanent not in waterfalls or in wars, but in men; not in order to make men into gods but to make them into full men, each one into a particular and unique man under and with God. What Auerbach says is typical of the Old Testament, what the David story illustrates, and what we shall see even more clearly in Jesus of Nazareth is that the biblical understanding of God's mode of operation in history is both with and for individuality.

It is, then, to the New Testament and especially to the man Jesus that we turn for our most complete picture of human life. It is not my intention to construct here a new Christology that will serve to integrate once again the transcendent dimension with historical life. Such a programmatic construction would be unconvincing, as well as pretentious. But the story of Jesus in the Gospels is the best model (and the first as well as the final reference) for the sort of relation between God and man that is as viable now as in the past. For the basic image of man suggested by the story of Jesus is that God and man are both agents, and the way they act toward one another provides us with the basic model for the integration of the divine and human spheres. If contemporary man sees

20. Auerbach, *Mimesis*, pp. 17-18.

himself primarily as one who has "come of age"; if he sees himself as an actor, a self who wills and does without the help of a *deus ex machina*; if he sees himself as one who becomes what he is through the decisions he himself makes—then the New Testament picture of Jesus is indeed a relevant one to him. The fault with some contemporary views of Jesus Christ is that they undercut his selfhood. Barth's image of Jesus tends toward Doceticism, toward a shadow-play relationship between the human and the divine; while Tillich and Robinson's view tends toward reductionism, toward a Christ who is like us in every way except for his self-immolation in surrender to God. The curious fact is that these otherwise diametrically opposed positions agree on one point—the sacrifice of the self of the man Jesus. Barth's Jesus is a man without conflicts; the Tillich-Robinson Jesus is a shell emptied of self.

But does the affirmation that God is with us and for us in Jesus Christ demand a negation of his selfhood? Hans W. Frei claims in a perceptive article that, on the contrary, we can learn much about the nature of selfhood from the Gospel accounts of Jesus.

What is a man? What we learn from the New Testament about this question is in part gained from its portrayal of the man Jesus of Nazareth. A man—in this instance the fully human savior who, by his action peculiar to himself, bestows a particular human identity upon the mythological savior figure—is what he *does* uniquely, the way no one else does it. It may be that this is action over a life-time, or at some climactic moment, or both. When we see something of that sort, especially if we see it at some climactic stage which recapitulates a long span in a man's life—when we see the loyalty of a life-time consummated at one particular point, but even if we see hitherto ambiguous strands in his character pruned and ordered in a clear and decisive way at that point, then we are apt to say: "Here he was most of all himself." In that kind of passage from free intention into action, ordering the two—intention and act—into one harmony, a free man gains his being. He becomes what he is; he gains his identity. Something like this seems also to be the portrayal of Jesus in the gospels. Jesus, in this portrayal, was most of all himself in the short and climactic sequence of his public ministry, rising to this resolve and this entry into the situation of helplessness. We must, above all, not abstract one from the other: As if, in the N.T., the event of the crucifixion were anything without Jesus' resolve, or the resolve anything



without the event in which it took concrete shape! In his general intention to enact, in obedience to God, the good of men on their behalf, and at the crucial juncture, his specific resolve to do so if necessary in this terrifying way—and in the event in which this intention and resolve were enacted, Jesus was most of all himself. This was his identity. He was what he did and underwent: The crucified human savior.<sup>21</sup>

The identity of the man Jesus is his uniquely; it is not the identity of any other man or of God. Yet it is both a pattern for other men and a revelation of God, for in this man the human and the transcendent are united as they are nowhere else. The form of this union—a union by and through the decisions of this man in his particular historical circumstances—suggests the way in which the divine enters human life and history. God does not enter history from “out there,” breaking apart the structures of personal and social development, nor does he simply infuse human emotional life with overtones of depth. Rather, he qualifies human intention in such a way that when a man is most of all himself he can be at the same time most fully open and receptive to God. In the case of Jesus, the utter openness to God and obedience to him was not a fait accompli at the beginning of his life, but a process of maturation. Being God for man does not mean being a sacred infant in a manger; but means a total life of activity on man’s behalf. To be sure, it was Jesus’ destiny right from the manger to be what he was, but destiny means development, becoming what one is through what one does. And this in turn means that even Jesus became who he was only by means of decisions made in the particularity, ambiguity, and complexity of historical life. Frei shows that the Gospels depict his development from a generalized humanity in the legendary infancy stories to a concrete, unsubstitutable identity in the passion narratives.

Christ resurrected is far from being a mythological figure in the accounts. He is most fully historical at this point, if by “historical” we mean that he is regarded as an unsubstitutable individual in his own right. His actions and manifestations do not have a symbolical or purely representative character; they do not gain significance through being in an exalted or elevated sense typical of human or divine activity par excellence. They fit, at this point, neither the

21. Frei, “Reflections on the Gospel Accounts,” pp. 7–8.

classical tragic nor the mystery account. They are more nearly like a novel or a short story. They are, whether fictional or real, a specific set of particular actions and reactions for which no other could be substituted; just as in a novel the actions of the principals upon each other gain their peculiar and significant character by being these particular and no other actions, wrought by these and no other interactions of events and persons. That is why and how they are the embodiment of his unsubstitutable identity.<sup>22</sup>

At the moment when the man Jesus was most fully one with God, he was most fully himself, most fully the unique, unsubstitutable agent of his own destiny. The point to stress is that according to this model utter dependence on God (in this instance to the point of union) does not involve a loss of selfhood, but on the contrary, the full flowering of it.

I am not suggesting that anthropology be read off Christology or that every man institute his own brand of union with God. Rather, I am suggesting that the place at which God impinges principally on the world—the selfhood of man, rather than directly in nature or history—and the way he does it—as the qualifier and goal of human intention and action—is a model for the integration of the human and the divine that is viable to modern man. The qualification of human intention, the shaping of the intrinsic structures of personal, historical life—this is the pattern I am suggesting. Frei gives an excellent illustration of this pattern when he speaks of the qualities of power and powerlessness in Jesus. We ought not, he says, to think of such divine and human qualities in Jesus as givens, with Jesus as the “human point of coordination.” For “a man’s being is the unique and peculiar way *in which he himself holds together* the qualities which he embodies—or rather, the qualities which he is.”<sup>23</sup>

When we speak of the contrast of power and powerlessness in Jesus as he is depicted in the gospels, we have in mind no mere paradox, tension or transition between two states, qualities or situations in a cosmic and spiritual power struggle. Rather we have in mind the astonishing mystery and changing situation of a human being whose consistent intention is also portrayed as that of his and the universe’s God: The accomplishment of men’s salvation. For that reason the contrast and its holding together are best expressed in terms of the quality of love in his relation to his fellow men. But

22. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

we must stress once again that the quality is not simply and directly predominant over all other characteristics that we may see together with it. The unity of his personal being depicted in the gospels, we are saying, is not to be seen *directly*, by the adumbration of personal excellences discernible in him and then choosing that most noticeable in comparison to the others as the first. That unity is seen more nearly *indirectly* as the shaping of all his personal qualities in conformation to his mission or aspiration in obedience to God: And in this sense love to men governed his life. In this respect his intention was, as far as the portraits show him to us, wholly assimilated to the intention of his heavenly Father who, in the words of the fourth gospel's commentary on the story of Jesus, "so loved the world that he gave his only Son . . ." (John 3:16).<sup>24</sup>

We have in the model of Jesus, as this passage suggests, not only the form of divine-human relations—the shaping of human intention and action through its own intrinsic structures—but also the content, as Christians understand it. For the shaping of men by God is always, in some sense, the shaping of love. It is a shaping of one's entire self—what one has become and is yet to become—by openness to God's love. The integration of the divine and the human in Christian terms always means the communion of those bound in love—the love of God to man, of man to God, of man to man. A life that is shaped in this way is one that is at the same time entirely one's own and entirely God's. Not all forms of love, of course, can accommodate to the realities of the other—let the beloved become himself—but the love of God for man as shown in the life story of Jesus was and is such a love. In traditional terms, it is the love of the humiliated, lowly servant who took the human, ungodlike way with human, ungodlike man. In modern terms, it is a love that schools itself to the structures of human reality.

Whether or not one accepts the content of this model, the form can stand on its own feet. That is to say, whether or not one believes that the power that rules is the power of love, one can see that the pattern makes good sense. And it seems particularly relevant to contemporary men. If secular man sees himself as having come of age, as a doer whose goal is to become a definite individual through his own decisions, then the model from Christology ought to be significant to

24. *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

him. It suggests an image of human life that takes with utmost seriousness the density and complexity of temporal existence, the particular historical circumstances of each man's life, and the responsible agency of man. It supports human life not in the sense that the Christian faith enthusiastically endorses modern trends, but in the sense that this model recognizes responsible agency as significant, for it claims that whatever takes place between God and man takes place here. In the Christian view, human life gains its significance precisely because it is the realm where God impinges on the world. The human agent is the chosen place of divine influence; the density and reality of God meet the density and reality of the human self. God (no less and how much more!) is a person, a self, not a coordinating point for attributes or an undifferentiated depth. We are not here concerned with the riches and reality of the divine subject, except to say that because he always operates as a self in relation to other selves, as the Old Testament narratives of Moses, Abraham and Isaac, and David, as well as the New Testament picture of Jesus clearly show, he is the God for modern man as he was for our fathers.

What, then, does all of this amount to? It amounts to nothing more (but nothing less) than the traditional Hebraic-Christian, Western, and literary affirmation that human life can indeed get somewhere. It amounts to the willingness to stand firm with historical, temporal life and refuse any escapes from it, whether they be upward, downward, or inward. The important point is that the image of man that I have suggested—which is novel only in its insistence on the importance of decision in concrete, contemporary life—allows for and supports such a stance. It cannot, of course, demand or coerce novelists, playwrights, or anyone else to accept it, but it might persuade them to put more trust in historical existence.

To trust in historical existence, to be persuaded that human life matters, does not mean that anything short of commitment to the God of love is diabolic or atheistic. The primary point is the form, not the content of the transcendent operation. Even damnation can be a sign of trust in historical existence (as Farinata shows) when it is the result of

personal decisions over a lifetime. To take the Christian understanding of the relation of the human and the divine as normative means, for one thing, acceptance of a pattern of operation. This pattern claims that man is an agent and that whatever the content of divine activity may be, it is always schooled to the realities of man as doer. The model I have suggested is noncommittal about what happens, for only the eyes of faith can claim that "in everything God works for good" (Rom. 8:28). The sacramental model integrating the finite and the transcendent understands the world, especially nature, as the place where God shines forth in his glory and goodness. It offers a mystical route to God; it suggests a new source of revelation; it implies that the power behind the symbols is the true, the good, and the beautiful. My model does none of these things, for when the place of encounter is the self rather than nature and when the activity is God's will for this self, the operation is necessarily in secret and radically particular. Such a pattern—even for those who have doubts about the ultimate direction of divine power—ought to make us happy to be human beings, for the one thing upon which this pattern insists is that human, secular, contemporary life is important. Things really happen here—for better or worse, to be sure, but they do happen.

The model of human life that we have been considering is at the most a persuasive one. No theist has ever been successful in proving anything about his own commitment. The most that a theist can and ought to do is to show how the God in whom he believes makes sense out of all sorts of other things. The Christian theologian makes connections between the event of Jesus Christ as the primary revelation of God and everything else. Nothing can be proven by this method, but men can be persuaded to take the Christian view seriously because and if it does indeed make sense out of life. The particular issue at hand is the image of man, and it is my view that the Hebraic-Christian understanding of human life makes the best sense out of it.

But such an image is not the sole property of Christianity. In fact, one of the reasons for being persuaded about its truth is that it is substantiated by other sources. It is the image that



has been implied throughout this book, an image that sees man as radically dynamic and historical. It is an image that derives support from literary theory, from the novel, from the Christian life, as well as from our common-sense awareness of the logic of human experience. In our description of aesthetic experience we concluded that the distinctive note of such experience is wonder at the new insights of an aesthetic object into the basic structure of human experience, a wonder called forth by its reflection of the complexity and dynamism of experience and its expression of new depths and dimensions into the logic of experience. Analysis of the novel suggested that novels do not project one image of man but many, for all novels are about man experiencing. Hence, the image of man in the novel is intensely dramatic—it is man in the making, man neither determined by fate nor under the benevolent protection of providence but open to his destiny. The world in which the man of the novel lives is a legacy from the world that Dante's man inhabited.

[It is] neither a realm of dark necessity nor a peaceful land of God; no, the cleft is really open, the span of life is short, uncertain, and decisive for all eternity; it is the magnificent and terrible gift of potential freedom which creates the urgent, restless, human, and Christian-European atmosphere of the irretrievable, fleeting moment that must be taken advantage of.<sup>25</sup>

Our understanding of the New Testament picture of the Christian life was one that saw it as a life of response to God and men, concrete responses made in the actual mundane reality of daily living and calling for an understanding of the complexity and richness of finite existence. Finally, the assumption running throughout all these discussions was the empirical observation that life is this way—it is a process involving possibility and limitation, freedom and destiny, insight only through concrete decisions. It is the assumption that the harmony, resolution, or maturity significant to human life is attainable only by working through the complexity and tensions of concrete temporal existence.

It ought to be evident throughout this book that I have

25. Auerbach, *Dante*, p. 132.

been brought to the affirmation of this model for human life as much through literature, particularly novels, as through the Bible and theology. Or perhaps it is better to say that reading certain novels gives one the "feel" for the model that one could not get from theology or the Bible, except for an occasional narrative such as the story of David. So it is a mutual affair. Theology offers to novelists a suggested structure; novels offer to the theologians (and everyone else) the flesh on the bones, the concrete experience of what it means to say that human life matters, that what one does with one's time is important. Great novels (or even just good ones) have always made this claim, and today when the voices celebrating life are sometimes weak, those who believe in the significance of human life ought to join hands.

This is to say no more than Bonhoeffer says when he claims that whoever is on the side of man is on the side of Jesus Christ.<sup>26</sup> Christians and novelists can be united concerning the basic form of human life, whether or not they agree on the ultimate direction of that life. If the way is true to the logic of human experience, then the insights can be true, whether or not the goal is the one that Christians believe is the true one. Thus, novelists need not be on the side of either the devil or the angels—they can simply be on the side of man. Nor are all serious artists in despair, as Tillich would claim, depicting only the negativities of life. R. W. B. Lewis points out in *The Picaresque Saint* that some novelists, at any rate, seem to have a good deal of joie de vivre, though in Tillich's terms their taste for life would be suspiciously "autonomous." They have sought grounds for living in life itself, because they have experienced a conversion from concentration on death to faith in the value of life and particularly of human companionship.

For the world of Silone and Camus, of Faulkner and Moravia and Greene and Malraux, perhaps the best single word is "human." It is a world in which the chief experience has been the discovery of what it means to be a human being and to be alive.<sup>27</sup>

26. "Whatever humanity and goodness is found in this fallen world must be on the side of Jesus Christ" (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, ed. Eberhard Bethge, trans. Neville Horton Smith [New York, 1955], p. 100).

27. Lewis, *Picaresque Saint*, p. 9.

Christians often regard humanism as the classic enemy of Christianity. But such a perspective issues from theological imperialism, not from a thoughtful appreciation of the varieties of humanism. The sort of humanism that Lewis finds in Silone, Camus, Moravia, Faulkner, and others does not argue against a theocentric basis but only despairs of finding one. It is a humanism extolling whatever decency, humor, sanity, compassion, and forgiveness there may be in man's relations with man. These are "goods" wherever they are found, and Christians ought to encourage whoever is promoting them. And the way in which they are promoted in the works of the novelists Lewis mentions is certainly commensurate with the Christian image of man. The humanism of Faulkner and Camus is a tough-minded one: there is for them no easy way, only a way that is thick with the intricacies of concrete choices and consequences. A Christian would claim, and rightly, that such a humanistic image of man is a truncated one. But as he says this, he ought also to point out that the Christian image of man is neither "this-worldly" nor "other-worldly," but in a profound sense, human, for its main concern is the fulfillment of persons by a God who operates in and through the density of human realities.

The Christian theologian and the novelist share a common concern for the reality and profundity of human life, for keeping sensibility and thought straight about the actualities of historical existence. They are united in this common task and each has peculiar contributions to make to it. In a time when, as Erich Heller says, there is "the consciousness of life's increasing depreciation,"<sup>28</sup> we need every voice that can celebrate the stature and beauty of human life when its difficulty, intricacy, and depth are met head on—an insight that is the common property of great literature and the Christian story.

28. Heller, *Disinherited Mind*, p. ix.

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